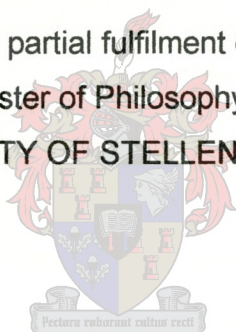


**CHILDREN AS HERMENEUTES : READINGS OF
THE SEVEN PARABLES IN MATTHEW THIRTEEN**

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for the degree of Master of Philosophy (Bible Skills) at the
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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

ABSTRACT

This qualitative empirical study is located in one of the aims of Bible Skills which focuses on 'the Bible in today's world' and specifically on the foregrounding of the ordinary reader in recent research. The study aimed to answer two mutually dependent research questions about children as ordinary readers of the Bible. The first question was concerned with the sense children of ten make of the seven parabolic units in Matthew thirteen and the second with the children's hermeneutical processes and strategies. A small sample of thirteen Grade 5 learners was divided into three leaderless groups to work out over three discussion episodes what the parables meant to teach. All discussions were audio-taped, transcribed and subject to a content analysis for features of the children's interpretations. The researcher's analysis of the readings was brought into dialogue with three previous critical assessments of the parables by trained readers. The discussion data were also used to make inferences regarding eight dimensions of the hermeneutical task. Two tentative conclusions relative to the two research questions were drawn from these observations. The children could readily conceptualize reading parables as a search for meaning and were well able to discover together an agreed and intelligible meaning of the allotted parables. The children also had available to them and could intuitively use an identifiable pattern of hermeneutical strategies. Several limitations of the study are considered, together with some implications for the study of the Bible in religious education and some comments on further research.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie kwalitatiewe empiriese navorsing beliggaam een van die doelwitte van die Bybelvaardighede program wat op die Bybel in die hedendaagse wêreld wil fokus terwyl dit veral die oog het op die rol van die gewone leser in onlangse navorsing. Die studie beoog om twee onderling afhanklike vrae oor kinders as gewone lesers van die Bybel te beantwoord. Die eerste vraag wil vasstel watter betekenis kinders van tien jaar oud uit die sewe gelykenisse in Matteus 13 kan haal. Die tweede vraag wil bepaal oor watter hermeneutiese prosesse en strategieë die kinders beskik.

'n Klein toetsgroep van dertien Graad 5 leerlinge is in drie leierlose groepe verdeel. Hulle moes by drie gespreksgeleenthede beraadslaag oor wat die gelykenisse veronderstel is om te beteken. Die gesprekke is op band vasgelê, oorgeskryf en die inhoud ontleed vir kenmerke van die kinders se verstaan daarvan. Die navorser se ontleding van die kinders se vertolking word daarna vergelyk met die kritiese lees van die gelykenisse deur drie vakkundige lesers. Die besprekingsdata word ook gebruik om agt afleidings oor aspekte van die hermeneutiese taak te maak.

Ten opsigte van die twee navorsingsvrae word daar twee gevolgtrekkings gemaak. Die kinders kon maklik insien dat die lees van gelykenisse eintlik 'n soek na betekenis is en hulle dat hulle saam op 'n sinvolle manier betekenis in die gelykenisse kon ontdek. Die kinders het ook beskik oor bepaalde hermeneutiese strategieë wat hulle kon aanwend. Verskeie grense van die studie word self aangetoon, terwyl bepaalde implikasies van die navorsing vir Bybelonderrig in godsdiensoonderrig uitgewys, asook opmerkings oor verdere navorsing gemaak word.

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I also record my thanks to the Bible Society of South Africa who gave permission for the use of copyright material from the *Good News Bible*.*

For permission to carry out this study in their school I thank the Principal and the Grade 5 educators. Above all, I am most grateful to the children in Grade 5 who made this study possible by sharing with me their engagement with the parables in Matthew thirteen.

My indebtedness to Elizabeth surpasses all measure.

Finally, this study is prayerfully and respectfully dedicated to the Child 'in the Temple, sitting with the Jewish leaders, listening to them and asking questions' (GNB).*

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INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries and in a variety of circumstances, from the first oral transmission and through the times of the printed word, children have been listening to or reading 'Bible stories'. They have been variously moved to wonder by these stories, bored to tears by them, terrified by them, thrilled by them, left totally indifferent to them, even alienated from them. And further, generally speaking, children have been the recipients of the dominant interpretations of these stories in home, liturgy, preaching and teaching. Rarely have the expert exegetes in these locations been attentive to children's own struggles to come to a reading of biblical text.

Yet as this insight from West notes:

It's not true that only experts really know what the Bible is about. It's not as if the relay baton has to be passed from them to systematic theologians, ministers, elders, parents and finally children. I think we should start with the church, with children and their faithful interpretations of the Bible (West 1991:227).

Such a reflection resonates with the familiar quotation of Jesus' words in Luke's Gospel (18:16-17):

Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Remember this! Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it (GNB).

Again, we hear a clear affirmation of a powerless and voiceless group and a challenge which demands we listen with the utmost seriousness to children. It is to them that the Kingdom of God appears to be open. Children are indeed identified by Jesus as 'Kingdom entry parables' to use Berryman's (1979:273) memorable phrase.

So this study 'starts with children'. It attempts to give a voice to the interpretations of children themselves by recording how some of them read biblical text and the conclusions they come to. In so doing I attempt to follow the lead given by scholars who have recorded the perspectives and interpretations of other historically voiceless groups, especially of women and the poor.

In the first chapter I outline the contextual frame work to the study by way of a survey of the relevant available literature. I begin by a discussion of the contributions of, and the major problems and issues involved in, past research into our understanding of, among other concerns, children's interpretations of biblical text, especially parable. I then look briefly at research from a linguistic perspective. In the section following I present the perspective on hermeneutics that I have chosen to follow. Finally, I examine something of the contribution of reader-research criticism, especially empirical studies in this area, and end the chapter by proposing two research questions.

Against this background the chapter which follows, Chapter 2, is a straightforward account of my qualitative research methodology which is non-causal and relatively loose in design. I describe the location, the setting, the materials used, the subjects, the procedure followed, and the management of the data.

In Chapter 3, the data from an introductory Learner Profile Questionnaire and the results from the children's readings are presented in tabulated form.

Next, in Chapter 4, the results are explored and brought into dialogue with three contemporary scholarly interpretations of the seven parables in Matthew 13 (Patte 1987; Stock 1994; Jones 1995) in a process of 'critical testing' (Conradie et al. 1989:39). I then reflect on some of the processes underlying the children's interpretative activities that lead to their explanations of the chosen parables, recognizing how extremely difficult it is to do this in any sense adequately.

The fifth and last chapter examines the limitations of the study and its tentative conclusions. It also develops some possible implications and insights from my account of children as hermeneutes for the issues surrounding the educational purposes Bible Skills is to serve in the context of the new direction the religious education of children is taking in South Africa's secular and plural democracy.

CHAPTER 1

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My title for this chapter has been deliberately chosen over the other possibility: 'A Theoretical Framework'. The choice is intended to underline that there is no clear, unified and accepted theory in biblical studies or the broader hermeneutical undertaking that addresses children. It is, as Nel (1990:218) points out, a field in which the development of theory is no slight task though an important one for continuing reflection and for urgent empirical research (Nel 1991: 632).

The following review is of the literature of the past forty years or so encompassed in two broad categories: children and the Bible and insights from other relevant and related literature. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a critical context for the research design which follows.

RONALD GOLDMAN

One of the most challenging aspects currently in biblical studies is the renewed and increasing attention being devoted to the particular problem of the 'gap' between trained and ordinary readers of the Bible (e.g. Jonker 1997). Several researchers have attempted to bridge this gap by focusing on investigating the ways in which adults as 'ordinary' readers come to biblical texts. *Semeia* 73 (1996) records a wide variety of such explorations of 'academic scholars who actively read with non-academic readers' (West & Dube 1996:14). It appears that if we understand how 'ordinary' readers read biblical text and the problems they experience, we have a basis for clarifying the role of the 'trained' reader at their interface with 'ordinary' readers.

In contrast to this work with adults, very little work has been generated on the topic of children as a significant group of 'ordinary' readers. For instance, ALTA lists only a few references in citations from the mid-1960's on the topic of children's reactions to biblical material. No explanation can be offered to account for this apparent dearth. There have been, however, considerably more listings in each of the three or four past decades of practical advice on 'teaching' the Bible (e.g. Hartin 1988; Hull 1996; Roux 1994) and on the broader themes of the religious education and the religious thinking of children. A watershed event in this latter regard was the publication of Ronald Goldman's seminal and much discussed study, *Religious thinking from childhood to adolescence* in 1964. Goldman (1964) investigated the development of some religious concepts in children through their understanding of 'simplified versions' (1964: 37; 253-4) of Bible stories.

Goldman's method was on the Genevan pattern of the clinical interview used within a Piagetian framework of stages or periods of cognitive development. Goldman accepted Piaget's stage theory as normative. He also accepted that

the interviewer knew what questions are *supposed* to be asked about the material used in the interview.

In essence, Goldman's findings were that the progression and development of religious thinking, as he conceptualized it, though slower, followed Piaget's categories. He also found that the boundaries between the intuitive, concrete operational and abstract stages of religious thinking were not fixed and varied from child to child. His redesignation of these levels of religious thinking are pre-religious, sub-religious and religious (Goldman 1964). A number of studies prompted by the same Piagetian perspective followed with varied findings.

Post-Goldman studies

In order to avoid the problems raised by Goldman's use of narratives of the miraculous, Whitehouse (1972) used Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus (Luke 19: 1-10) to investigate children's religious thinking in the first year (approx. 8 year olds) and fourth year (approx. 11 year olds) of the UK Junior school. She used an audio-taped version of the story from a 'youth Bible' and, like Goldman, interviewed the children in her sample individually. The interview was structured with a set of questions to do with Jesus' welcome and acceptance of sinners and the ideas of repentance and restitution. The children's thinking was categorized, after Piaget, as at an intuitive, concrete, or formal level.

The results were then related to variables such as (the now generally discredited) 'mental age' and established tentative confirmatory links with Goldman's findings about the lower limits of formal thinking. Whitehouse (1972:22) concludes that 'the intellectual understanding of religious symbolism is unlikely until about the mental age of 13.5' and she also questions whether

the religious needs of children can be met by the presentation of Bible stories in isolation.

Also in 1972, Greer reports on the questions and problems of understanding faced by a limited number of small groups of 6-17 year olds who listened to a tape recorded summary of the Genesis story of creation. The discussion which followed was encouraged by seven questions which were introduced by the researcher in 'as natural a way as possible' (Greer 1972:100). The results from an analysis of the discussion transcripts indicate three broad problematic areas: questions about the creation of the universe, the problems of reconciling theological and scientific worlds and the understanding of the symbolism of the Genesis myth. Greer's conclusions from the difficulties raised are that the younger children tended to interpret the Genesis story literally but there is also 'ample evidence' of dissatisfaction among many of the children with such literal thinking. His final concern is for 'the difficulties of transforming primitive literalism and of reformulating the insights of biblical faith in an intelligible non-mythical way' (Greer 1972: 110). The practicalities of such 'transforming' and 'reformulating' are left as a challenge to his readers. It should also be noted that no actual biblical text was used in this study and that the questions introduced into the children's discussions could have predetermined the doubts and problems the children raised.

Among the flurry of post-Goldman studies was one (Morley 1975) which replicates Goldman's exactly but with children who, at that time, were labelled 'educationally sub-normal'. Not surprisingly, a comparison of Morley's results with Goldman's (1964) showed 'that, in general, the educationally sub-normal children reached the stages of religious thinking at a later chronological *but an*

earlier mental age' (Morley 1975: 109, original emphasis). This latter finding is explained by the compensating life experiences of the older children.

Again, the researcher concludes that material for religious education with these children must be carefully selected and that their 'readiness for religion' must be developed by building a background of life-centred concepts.

A study by Peatling (1973) also parallels the main approach by Goldman (1964). Peatling investigated from a Piagetian perspective children's 'religious thinking' as Goldman defined it. He examined children's interpretations of the same three 'stories' used by Goldman but differed by using a pencil-and-paper instrument in a multiple-choice format with groups of children rather than the individual semi-structured interview.

The test, called *Thinking about the Bible* (TAB), has been used by subsequent researchers despite some serious problems about the test's theological assumptions, its validity, and the conclusions drawn from the test responses. These limitations were identified by Greer (1984) in his use of Peatling's test with children in Northern Ireland. Greer concedes, however, that TAB is 'a step in the right direction' (1984: 113) in efforts to develop a convenient instrument for the study of the religious thinking of *groups* of children.

A comparative study of the abstract religious thinking of two denominational groups (Degelman, Mullen & Mullen 1984) also used Peatling's TAB to investigate the development of religious thinking and its relationship to a literal understanding of the Bible. Once again, the results supported the notion of an 'increase in the preference for abstract modes of expression over the school years' (Degelman, Mullen & Mullen 1984: 48). This finding indicates that the

Grade 5 learners used in the present study should have relatively lower preference for abstract modes of expression and a greater degree of 'concreteness' in their interpretation of biblical material. Further, the Degelman et al. study together with Peatling (1973) suggest it would be of interest and value to have some assessment of research subjects' perceptions of 'literalism'.

Children and parables

It is interesting that Goldman did not use a parable among his research material despite the extensive use of analogy, metaphor and simile in religious thinking and in the Bible, specifically in Jesus' use of life experiences in parable to communicate religious truth. He does question in passing, however, the suitability of the parables of Jesus in the religious education of children before they have reached Piaget's stage of formal operations. One support for this, besides inference from his own research, is a study Goldman quotes (Ainsworth 1961) which concludes that it is unlikely that children can manage the propositional thinking involved in understanding parables before the age of about thirteen. It should be pointed out that Ainsworth in her study using parables with children, obtained her research data, like Peatling in 1973, by means of a multiple-choice instrument with its inherent imposition of interpretation and its tendency to encourage guessing.

Another study (Beechick 1974) followed Goldman in the use of the problematic structured interview format to collect data on children's understanding of parable material. The Beechick (1974) and Ainsworth (1961) studies propose from their investigations three levels of understanding parables by children: the literal or explicit level, the allegorical, and the application or practical use of the parable. Their independent finding was that the allegorical level is reached only by older children.

Murphy (1977) followed up this question of whether children's understanding of parables develops in stages using a large sample of two hundred learners ranging from six to eleven years of age. Murphy used both a semi-structured interview and a verbally administered multiple-choice questionnaire with two separate groups from his sample to investigate their understanding of six New Testament parables. The versions were either 'modernized' ones or from a 'child's Bible' so as 'to translate culture-bound factors in the parables into the culture more familiar to the children' (Murphy 1977:169). The children's interpretations were also categorized as purely literal, or applied, or as understood allegorically. Although the latter appeared to be 'only appreciated by older children' (1977:168) of about ten years of age or more, Murphy warns (1977:172) that his study gives 'little support to the simple stage-development theory of the development of understanding of biblical parables'. What supports this conclusion are his findings that the *parable* itself, the *form* in which it is told, and how the understanding of the parable is *tested* all markedly influence levels of meaning as he differentiates them.

Research from the field of reading instruction (Readance, Baldwin and Rickelman 1983) suggests that an additional factor which may be playing a critical role in the interpretation of the metaphorical language of parables is the word knowledge, or vocabulary, of learners.

Knowledge of the 'ground' attribute in metaphorical statements was found to increase the correct interpretation of metaphors and vice versa. The researchers suggest in consequence that direct instruction in enhancing vocabulary is a practical and effective way of improving the comprehension of metaphor and simile to be encountered in a reading text. Such findings are significant in attempts to answer the question *how* we might present parables to children when and if we do.

In addressing this latter question of whether we ought to present parables to children, Berryman (1979:272) provocatively challenges the findings of research on children's readings of parables 'designed to catch only rational, analytical, analogy-using, propositional, left-brain' kinds of knowing. He describes a Montessori-type presentation of the Good Shepherd using an iconic representation of laminated figures on a flat felt underlay to 'materialize' the parable and make it 'available to all stages of faith development, even the earliest' (1979:277).

While this non-verbal communication of parables to children provokes attractive questions for investigation they were not pursued here. What Berryman's view of parables and children did encourage is a recognition of the importance of personal interaction with parable as opposed to teaching *about* parable. So this study looks to allowing biblical text to provoke its own challenge and to provide an opportunity for children to make explicit their own understanding of parables.

The emphasis in Berryman's article on imagination, story and symbol is one expression of a reaction by authors in Western Germany (at that time), England and America in the early eighties against the bias towards cognitive development theories in religious education (Schweitzer 1987). We shall return to these reservations below in the section on linguistic perspectives.

In sum, these studies of children and parables prompted the questions: What significance and meaning does Jesus' central teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven have for children? How do children in their own right interpret the symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven?

Some critiques

Goldman and post-Goldman researchers have not been without their critics. According to one evaluation (McGrady 1987) of three Piagetian-based studies (Goldman 1964; Peatling 1973; Murphy 1979), a number of limitations emerge: (a) the applicability of an approach using practical situations, such as the direct manipulation of quantities of liquid, to textual material describing an event, such as Goldman's rewrite of the supernatural event of Moses and the burning bush (Ex3:1-6); (b) an inadequate explication of the relationship between theological development and Piagetian operational development; and, (c) the confusion of Piagetian stages in some post-Goldman research.

What is of more critical significance to this study, however, were the curriculum recommendations that emanated from this research: an abandonment of Bible-centred approaches in religious education in favour of thematic child- or life-centred approaches. The view that 'the Bible is not a children's book' (Goldman 1964:227) prevailed in many post-Goldman educational recommendations and resulted in the Bible as text being withheld or restricted until the age when the appropriate level of conceptual development supposed to have been reached. In fairness to Goldman, he did correct this misconception concerning no Bible teaching before the age of twelve in a later work (1965). He writes: 'I do suggest a drastic reduction on Bible material in syllabuses before this age, but the difference does not lie so much in the quantity of Bible material used as the way in which we use it' (Goldman 1965: 70).

Slee (1986) is also critical of the model of religious thinking used in Goldman's and subsequent studies and also of what McGrady (1983:129) elsewhere describes as these studies 'disturbingly light-weight Piagetian analyses'.

Another feature which Slee critiques is the methods of data collection used for investigating religious thinking, especially the interview design and its 'narrow logical focus' (Slee 1986:86 & 89).

Paradoxically, alongside this omission of the Bible on grounds of conceptual development has been the inclusion in religious education curricula of a corpus of myth and legend from religious traditions other than Christianity. Not all writers have accepted this omission of the Bible. Their contention is that a study of Christianity within the believing community or secular school cannot avoid the sacred text of the faith as a part of that study.

Priestly (1980) makes a convincing case against the concern for concepts and conceptual development and controlled telling and interpretation rather than the apprehension of insights and truth by the imagination. His argument is not for a return to a more strictly Bible-based curriculum, though, but for a 'place' for the Bible 'where its truth can be judged alongside of that of other content, if only teachers have the courage to give and let go' (Priestly 1980:24).

The Gobbels (1986:1) in their response to what should be 'our concern in teaching children the Bible' come to a similar conclusion as Priestly. They acknowledge that children cannot understand the Bible as adults do: it is just that their understanding will be different. I take this to imply that children's interpretations may be limited, even childish, but not wrong or intrinsically of less worth than those of 'trained' readers or even in need of authoritarian correction. In the tradition of developmental constructivism, the Gobbels argue, children can be given direct access to the Bible to construct meaning for themselves 'as they are able' (Gobbel & Gobbel 1986:9).

These emerging purposes for the Bible in education have prompted this researcher to encourage children to take up the task of interpretation for themselves 'as they are able' and to record and analyse their dialogue with a portion of actual biblical text. Such an approach seeks to embrace the notion of a trusting start to biblical interpretation (Conradie et al. 1998). This calls for a rethinking of children's pre-understanding as a first and provisional cycle in the 'hermeneutical spiral' which opens to a future process of development of ever widening spirals towards new and more 'complete' understanding in the quest for the ever elusive 'more or less adequate interpretation'.

Linguistic perspective

Whilst research in the area of the religious thinking of children has been dominated in early studies by the Piagetian paradigm, questioning of the results of such studies (e.g. Donaldson 1978) has prompted the investigation of alternative models. As mentioned earlier, there was in the late seventies and eighties a reaction against limiting notions of religious thinking to logical reasoning and one of the models developed proposes for examination a wider range of linguistic features of religious discourse (Slee 1987). An example of one empirical study on linguistic lines was carried out by Turner in 1978.

Turner reports the construction and standardization of a word-meaning test of religious language based on the view from cognitive psychology that tests of vocabulary give useful estimates of general intelligence. *The Religious Language Comprehension Test* that Turner developed offers sufficiently convincing reliability and validity data to accept his conclusion that the test gives 'a good measure of the intellectual comprehension of religious ideas' (Turner 1987:20).

One example of a context-free word for which a spontaneous definition was asked was 'parable'.

This type of linguistic study concentrates on the distinctive use of the smaller unit of individual words as religious vocabulary. Its specific focus spurs enquiry into characteristics other than the vocabulary of religious language which Slee (1987:64) suggests for research. One of the needs she identifies which will concern us here is for research on the comprehension of religious language in the narrative and figurative mode of the parable. Refinements of the two questions raised earlier (p.11) that came to mind at this point in my review of the literature and which contributed to the shape of my study were: What sense of a central concept of the Christian tradition such as the kingdom of heaven do children construct in a communal explication of parables? How does their hermeneutic discourse function to effect their understanding of parables?

There appear to be no studies by linguists engaged in discourse analysis of the structure of exegetical interaction to give guidance in handling the latter question posed above. This study will therefore appropriate descriptive categories from elsewhere.

Reader-response criticism

Another perspective, overlapping with those discussed above, from which the present study can be viewed is that of reader-response criticism since we concentrate here on children as readers and their reading experience. Of particular significance in the contribution of reader-response criticism to children's 'ordinary' readings of the Bible and their relationship to the readings

of the academically 'trained' is its tendency 'to grant value to *all* readings, whether expert or naive' (Fowler 1986:6, original emphasis).It should be noted at the outset that the qualifying terms 'ordinary' and 'trained' are not used because they are in any sense the received labels in reader-response criticism. There is in fact some ambiguity about the different terms used to describe 'readers' in their various abstractions (Fowler 1985).

The terms are used rather because they best evoke the distinctions this study seeks to make between 'ordinary' and 'trained' as polarities on a continuum rather than pure antitheses. The child readers we are talking about are probably somewhere towards the end of the continuum on a left to right positioning of 'trained' and 'ordinary' respectively. I have borrowed the definitions of 'ordinary' and 'trained' from those West (1999) proposes for 'ordinary reader' and 'biblical scholar' for their usefulness. I leave to others any problems in the distinction they make (Lategan 1966; Patte 1996).

Ordinary then is 'all readers who read the Bible pre-critically' (West 1999:10) thus including implicitly the ordinary child readers who are the 'flesh and blood' actors in this study who actually read the texts I supplied and,

trained are 'those readers who have been trained in the use of tools and resources of biblical scholarship and who read the Bible "critically"' (West 1999: 11).

Empirical reader research

Articles in the literature on reader research almost always focus on theoretical aspects. Consequently, very little is known about actual contemporary readings. Particularly lacking is empirical research on the readings of that large and important part of the majority of readers of the Bible, already introduced, the ordinary reader. Yet, the ordinary reader is identified as an important subject for research who can lead to a better understanding of the nature of the reading process.

Lategan and Rousseau (1988) in their empirical study compared an experimental and control group of first year students in Biblical Studies on their reading of Luke 12:35-48 before and after a course in hermeneutics. They set out, firstly, to classify various readings obtained from a written test consisting of a multiple-choice Bible knowledge questionnaire (Test 1) and an open-ended comprehension (Test 2) on the passage from Luke.

Test 1 also elicited biographical information from the testees. The interrelationship amongst the independent biographical variables and 'the patterns and processes in the reading of Biblical text' (1988:395) were examined. It is not possible to summarize all the 'tendencies' presented, but of particular importance were (a) the decisive influence of previous experience in group Bible study on Bible knowledge and (b) the 'autonomous thrust' of the text in determining the students' reading.

This well-planned research provides an important methodology for empirical reader research and some guidelines to the direction future research might take. Its main limitation is its applicability only to the literate minority of ordinary readers; the reception of the text is made contingent on the ability to express thoughts in writing in Test 2. Many readers may have something to say about a text but do not know how to write it.

Another study (Draper & West 1989) focused on the ordinary reader reading Mark 10:17-22 in the familiar context of Bible study groups in thirteen Anglican parishes. The groups were led by a facilitator who used a Bible Study Outline. A Group Profile Questionnaire was also administered, similar to the 'biographical profile' used in the study above. The methodology used, however, was quite different. While the previous study examined relationships between variables statistically, this study made a subjective analysis, verified by independent judges, of the transcripts of tape-recordings of the readings of the groups. The emphasis was on 'the hermeneutics of the group, on the methodology they use[d] in interpreting the biblical text' (1989:39).

Some eight dimensions of this methodology (which Draper & West are careful to describe as 'preliminary') are identified in their study (Draper & West 1989:34-44). The categories provide a workable if not definitive existing analytic and descriptive framework for distinguishing and separating out the strategies used in interpretative discourse.

The labels Draper and West have used could be incorporated into a research design as in the present study, as questions to be addressed to the data to code reading strategies:

- Do the subjects apply the text to their lives?
- Is there any awareness of reading the text historically?
- Is the text read as a literary unit?
- Is the text read canonically?
- Is the subjects' reading existential?
- Does the reading take context into account?
- Is the text read dualistically?
- Is there any familiarity with reading corporately?

The above questions are appropriated here to examine the structuring patterns which are the basic elements of the hermeneutics of the children who are the subjects of this study.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is probably the most difficult word in biblical studies to pin down in a consensual definition. Indeed, within any field of scholarship there are different approaches to hermeneutics and complex debates taking place about what exactly hermeneutics is. While scholars dispute what hermeneutics is, and its uses as a paradigm for the examination of text or 'text' as a metaphor for human social conduct (Packer 1985), this study takes one of the different conceptions in the hermeneutic tradition as a working concept to get on with the task in hand of learning something about children's behaviour as hermeneutes in their endeavour to make meaning of biblical text.

I adopt a particular formulation of biblical hermeneutics as strategy from Croatto(1987). Croatto (1987:ix) proposes that biblical hermeneutics is 'simply a method of reading the Bible'. I understand 'method of reading' to be nothing more than an organized effort by a reader (or readers) to respond to the questions they raise as they read. Therefore, in this study, I shall be looking for the implicit rules and methods (see also McKim 1986: xiii) used in the process of interchange between children in the act of interpreting and attempt to organize and explicate these observations. The questions listed at the end of the previous section will govern this attempt to come to a practical understanding of what children are about when they act like biblical scholars. In making this choice, I am conscious of the assumption that hermeneutics is a part of the children's experience and the assumption that there is a mutual relationship between what the children do when interpreting a text and hermeneutical processes.

The first assumption is affirmed by the notion that children as human beings can only grow in understanding one another and their world through an existence which calls for interpretation. In other words, children share intrinsically in interpretation as a 'universal feature of human experience' (Gallagher 1992:7).

The second assumption has less to affirm it. It is more an expression of naive optimism derived from psychology that by observing children's verbal activity as they attempt to construct meaning from text an account will be delivered about their thinking processes as hermeneutes. Hopefully, the framework of questions already referred to will give us at least partial access to the tangled web that constitutes the dynamics of understanding a text. Left untackled will be those factors which lead away from a 'more or less adequate interpretation' within the specific context of childhood.

The research questions

From the review of what the literature of the past three or four decade has to say to a researcher enquiring into children's activity as ordinary readers explaining and interpreting seven thematically linked biblical parables, two questions emerged to serve as guidelines to my study: one focusing on content and one on process:

1. What sense does a sample of Grade 5 learners make of the seven parables of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew thirteen? And,
2. what hermeneutical strategies and processes can be isolated from the total configuration of the learners' interaction as neophyte exegetes?

These aims being set , it remains to describe the method followed for this study.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to give an account of the methodology followed in this research project. It focuses on five aspects of the design: the location, the subjects, the materials used and the procedure which relates to the collection of the data from group discussions and, finally, the procedure and the management of the collected data.

Location

The social location of the Bible forms an important context in which it is used and interpreted. In this study the context is the micro-social system of a school classroom consisting of an educator and a varying number of learners.

The school used is a former Model C primary school in KwaZulu-Natal which serves a lower and middle income community. There is a developing ethnic mix

in the learners who attend this integrated school. The 'sampling' of the school was 'purposive'.

The room set aside for the administration of the group discussion tasks, referred to as Episodes, was a classroom which regularly serves as a discussion site and also for audiovisual presentations. The room is carpeted, which reduced ambient noise, and is free from distractions.

Five chairs were placed in front of the room in a u-shaped arrangement around a low table to facilitate discussion. At one end of the table a copy of the *Good News Bible* from which the researcher read was left in reach of all. Leaving the Bible in this way also gave it a presence as a book since the actual passages of the text used by the learners were photocopies.

No other resources or facilitation were offered. The decision to make what Hess (1993:193) describes as a 'common mistake' and not give the children a 'Study Guide' of carefully prepared questions was a calculated risk. My reason was to avoid imposing a hermeneutic on the children in my efforts to uncover the interpretative resources and strategies the children already have.

At the other end of the central table was an audio-recorder so that it was close to the speakers yet as unobtrusive as possible. The children did not forget that the recorder was there but the setting was otherwise as close as possible to a natural and familiar classroom group-work environment. Consequently, in discussing the biblical passages in this setting, the participants were performing a task routinely confronted in the study of a printed text in a room regularly used for this purpose. Hopefully the setting gave the learners a 'safe and sequestered' space which allowed them to question, to understand, and to create meaning for themselves.

The fieldwork in this location was conducted in mid-June of the school year.

Subjects

Subjects for this study consisted of a small and arbitrary number of 13 learners, both boys and girls, aged 10y 4m to 12y 9m (mean age 11y 1m) selected randomly from three regular Grade 5 classes of 62 learners. The original sample consisted of 16 learners but 3 were lost to the study through natural attrition.

The gender (girls = 55% and boys = 45% and ethnic (black = 23% and white = 77%) composition of the sample reflected the heterogeneity of the Grade 5 population of 62 learners (of 52% girls and 48% boys and 21% black and 79% white learners) and, according to the principal, was reflective of the whole school population. Only learners who had religious or other objections to the study and those whose spoken English was not adequate for group discussion were excluded from selection. I recognize that these exclusion criteria suppressed so-called 'deviant cases' and affect the classroom realities I was anxious to preserve.

Prior to the initiation of the study, signed informed consents were obtained from the parents or guardians of all the participants.

The sample was divided into three discussion sub -sets, one group from each of the three Grade 5 classes. This meant that one group, labelled S (of 5 learners), came from a streamed 'top class' and the other two groups, respectively labelled J (of 5 learners) and L (of 3 learners), came from two mixed-ability Grade 5 classes. Although the three groups were constituted for the purposes of this study, each group consisted of classmates who were part of a common classroom community with close relationships and a shared history. There was also an ethnic and gender mix in each group (see Table 1 below). Each group remained constant during the study and met independently three times, once on each of the three days of fieldwork to discuss the parables

(i.e. on the Monday, Wednesday and Thursday of the same week) in what have been labelled Episodes 1, 2, and 3. The particular parables allotted for each of the three Episodes are indicated below.

Materials

a. Learner Profile Questionnaire

A brief questionnaire (see Appendix 1) of ten items adapted from those used in other investigations was constructed and considered to be a useful instrument for exploring some of the dimensions in the context that children bring to the interpretative process; the dimensions that, as it were, 'fix the gaze' (Hess 1993:193).

The construction of the questionnaire began with requests for five items of general demographic information such as age, grade etc. These items were followed by four questions to establish where the Bible belonged in the children's social and personal world. A self-report rating-scale using nominal ratings was developed for the four questions. Each of these items required a response on a five-point Likert - type scale with bipolar extremes represented by such terms as 'Nearly every week' to 'Never'. The scale thus gives not only some idea of the direction of choice but also something of the intensity of the response.

The intention with this particular questionnaire was not to use the data for factorial analysis or to examine the complex functioning of these variables in relationship to the children's performance as interpreters (cf. Lategan & Rousseau 1988). Nor did the questions pretend to cover the whole of the children's context, only some key aspects, and their purpose was to identify and acknowledge the broader setting the children read from.

A final open-ended question requesting a definition of parable concluded the questionnaire. Of course, all the items do not meet the normal criteria of questionnaire construction nor those for validity or reliability; their purpose was, as already mentioned, informal.

Each learner in the study completed the questionnaire at the start of Episode 1 of the three discussion episodes.

b. The biblical text

Although the general view in religious education since the mid-sixties has been that 'the Bible is not a children's book' (Goldman 1964:227) it seemed reasonable that for *Bible* interpretation to mean what it says, the children in this project should concentrate their readings upon an actual biblical text. For this reason oversimplified or radically altered storybook versions of the parables such as those in publications reviewed by Schachter (1985) were rejected in favour of a modern English version as true as possible to the complexity and richness of the original text. The text also had to be appropriate to the children's ages, language and literacy levels (Newman 1980).

The text finally chosen though not a precise equivalent of the original, was that of the *Good News Bible* (1977): firstly, because it is 'intended for people everywhere for whom English is either their mother tongue or a language they learn' (*GNB* 1977: vii). This accommodated the readers identified as L1 and L2 (first and second language) speakers of English who were included in the sample for this study (see Table 1). Secondly, the *GNB* uses words and forms 'in current or widespread use' (*GNB* 1977: viii), for example, 'a man' for 'a sower' (*KJV* in v.4) and 'weeds' for 'tares' (*KJV* in v.26). Thirdly, the literacy demands of the *GNB* matched the children's basic mechanical reading skills as determined by the *Reading Experience Test* discussed in more detail below.

The instrument used to assess the readability of the *GNB* text of Matthew 13 was the *Fry Readability Formula* (Fry 1968).

c. The parables

The choice of the seven parables in Matthew 13 has much to commend it.

i. They are the largest concentration of parables on a single theme central in Jesus' teaching.

ii. They concern a theme, despite its theological, temporal and christological complexities (Kingsbury 1975), that Jesus linked to children and childlikeness. Matthew (18:1-4;19:13-15) even makes of children the true disciples of Jesus' church who have been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven. So children's spontaneous view of this very Kingdom should perhaps receive special attention while acknowledging that the abstract concept of the Kingdom of heaven is likely to be difficult for young readers to process. The objects and events in the chosen parables, however, are similar to and basically have the 'same' general significance as those existing in the culture of my research subjects (cf. Newman 1980). Though this life experience of the similitudes in Matthew 13 may not be extensive, it forms a useful basis on which to build the children's idea of the Kingdom of heaven. Children know, for instance, from pictures of pirate hoards what pearls and buried treasure are.

iii. Also, though of unlikely interest to children, Matthew's seven parables form the significant midpoint of the third discourse in the Gospel (cf. Combrink 1982).

iv. And, not least, the seven parables narrow down the research to a manageable expanse of text!

The texts finally chosen were then photocopied for the children's communal reading, each parable with its designation. The introduction to the tract (13:1-3a) and verse 36a were also retained to establish the locations and audiences for the parable discourse. Omitted was the remaining canonical context of the chapter in which, strictly speaking, the parables of the Kingdom

should be understood. These omissions consisted of the interpretation of the Parable of the Sower (13:18-23), the purpose of parables (13:10-17) and the formula quotations, the homily on the Parable of the Tares (13:36b-43), and the concluding situation (13:51-58), Jesus' questioning of the disciples understanding and his rejection in Nazareth.

Jesus' teaching about speaking in parables and the explanations of two of the parables were omitted because they seem to be distinct from the knowledge conveyed in the parables themselves, what Patte characterizes as 'the surplus knowledge, the mysteries' (Patte 1987:187). By taking out discrete parts of Matthew 13 for discussion I am taking the seven parables to function as autonomous narratives. This decision would seem to be acceptable to Jones (1995: 77) who has much the same view when he writes: 'The Matthew parables have individually and collectively their own story to tell.'

The use of all seven parables was to preserve their cumulative effect as catena (Culbertson 1995: xiv) to allow the children in this study to come to (or not to come to!) a basic knowledge about the kingdom of heaven, its presence and its coming. The grouping of the parables used for the three Episodes of the children's group reader activity on the three separate days follows Gerhardsson (1972):

Episode 1: (for each of the three groups on the Monday)

The introduction to the tracts and

1. the Parable of the Sower which, according to Gerhardsson, governs the order and arrangement of the following six parables.

Episode 2: (for each of the three groups on the Tuesday)

2. The Parable of the Weeds, and, after a short break,

3 & 4. The parable of the Mustard Seed and the Parable of the Yeast.

Episode 3: (for each of the three groups on the Thursday)

- 5 & 6. The second pair of parables: The Parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Parable of the Pearl and, after a short break,
7. The concluding parable, the Parable of the Net.

Literacy and readability

Since biblical interpretation in this study means what it says, it concentrates upon working with actual biblical text in which reading is used. A state of literacy must therefore be assumed. This raised two problems for the study:

- a. Do the participants have the level of literacy to enable full participation in ordinary Bible study?
- b. Are the 'readability' demands of the chosen text appropriate for the literacy levels of the participants?

a. Participants' levels of literacy

Despite general dissatisfaction in education with psychometrics in measuring literacy levels arising from a greater understanding of the reading process itself, norm-related data can still provide crude estimates of the level of children's reading ability. The norm-referenced reading test data available to me, although from a now dated test, the *Graded Test of Reading Experience, Test 12* (Daniels and Diack 1958) gave a limited but not wholly irrelevant measure of overall reading competence, and a measure of the children's ability to use reading to learn.

In Table 2 in the next chapter, the norm-related data from the reading test are presented as 'reading ages'. The reading attainments summarized in the mean level of performance of the groups and the total sample (the latter = 10y 0m) on the test indicate that although there was not an exact match between some individual reading scores and the readability of the chosen text, the children in the sample appeared to have the necessary literacy skills to cope with the

demands of the *Good News Bible*. Further, any remaining individual reading problems were considerably reduced by ensuring that the children also heard each text read aloud twice.

b. Readability of the text

Assessment of the readability of texts was considered useful in pointing the way to an answer to the second question above and to help in choosing a version of the biblical text the participants could cope with independently. A convenient 'readability' measure used here is the *Fry Readability Formula* (1968).

According to this formula the text of Matthew 13 in the *GNB* is appropriate for children with an approximate reading age of 10 to 11 years. By contrast, another text considered, the *Revised English Bible*, would be more appropriate for an approximate reading age at the 11 to 12 year level.

Procedure

The children were collected by the researcher from their regular classrooms for each of the episodes of discussion. Every effort was made through preliminary general conversation to put the children at ease and to maintain a regular classroom atmosphere before they were given any instructions. At their first meeting the children were asked to fill out the Learner Profile Questionnaire. The following standardized openings were used for each of the episodes and they were presented in a matter of fact way.

Entry process Episode 1:

Thank you for coming here today to help me with my research. You have been chosen to help me because I would like to hear your explanations of some parables in the Bible in Matthew Chapter 13.

Here is what we are going to do.

To start, you are going to fill in a form about yourself because I'm interested in learning more about you. The Learner Profile Questionnaire was then distributed.

Please complete this. Once completed, the questionnaires were collected.

Next, we are going to read a parable together and then, as a group, you are going to discuss what the parable means and I am going to tape-record what you say so that I don't miss any of the discussion. Photocopies of the first selection were then handed out to each child.

This is a story told by Jesus. I am going to read it aloud. The first pericope was then read aloud by the researcher from a copy of the GNB to allow the text to make its own appeal to the children first as 'hearers' and to make the source of their copies clear.

Now you read the parable through again silently. The children read silently.

Will one of you please read it again for us aloud? A volunteer was appointed to do this. *Thank you, (Name).* These three readings were made to focus attention on the text.

Now I want you to go through this parable one verse at a time and together try to work out what you think Jesus wanted to teach by the Parable of the Sower. Any questions before you begin?

The intention was to answer any questions briefly but none was raised.

Okay, I'm going to put on the tape-recorder and go over there. The desk at one side of the room was indicated. *Please speak clearly and one at a time.* The tape-recorder was switched on. *You can start now.* The researcher withdrew.

After starting in a participant role I moved to a detached observer role and sat at the teacher's desk. By withdrawing I hoped to place the text rather than the educator at the focus of attention. While the discussion progressed, I openly took occasional field notes of what I observed but did not participate in the discussion in any way. The purpose of the notes was to fill out the recorded data base with a written description of what occurred. The children appeared to accept readily my presence as part of the environment and my presence did not encourage any different behaviour from that of a regular classroom group discussion activity.

Subsequent Episodes 2 & 3:

Once the children were seated in the same places as before the following prefatory statement was made:

I think you understand now what we do in these sessions. You have already explained one parable (or other parables). Today I want you to explain some more from the same Chapter in Matthew, first this one. Copy handed out. After the children had finished with the first one, there was short break and the second text was handed out. As in Episode I, the researcher read aloud first from the Bible. The children then read silently and this was followed by a volunteer reading aloud.

Again I want you to work through this (these) parable(s) a line at a time and together try to work out what you think Jesus wanted to teach by the (parable was named).

Any questions?

Okay, I'm going to put on the tape-recorder and go over there again. Please remember to speak clearly and one at a time. The recorder was switched on.

You can start now.. As previously, I went to the teacher's desk and took notes until the children indicated that they were finished.

Each discussion ended when the children felt that they had reached a coherent understanding of the parable. The total discussion time over the three episodes was approximately twenty-seven minutes.

It is important to note in passing two cautionary considerations about the direction to 'work out what you think Jesus wanted to teach by the parable of the (designation of parable)' which was intended to allow the children as much freedom as possible. Firstly, such a broad response instruction implies a set of assumptions about what each of the parables 'meant' or 'means' (Meeks 1986). These assumptions in turn limit and direct the type and range of questions likely to be raised by the children. Secondly, the broad instruction together with the omission of a second question used in other studies on 'what you think the parable means for us today' (e.g. West 1991:181) was likely to place the children's interpretations outside the dynamic of the text as part of Christian Scripture.

Data Management

With the fieldwork of the study completed the processing of the data from the Learner Profile Questionnaire and the discussion episodes began: the latter a problematic area in naturalistic enquiry.

The personal background data and the responses to the questions on the questionnaire were tabulated (see Table 1 in the following chapter). This raised no problems since all the blanks to be filled in and the questions, except for Question 5, admitted of only one answer. For Questions 1 to 4 the sum of the responses expressed as a rounded-off percentage of the total responses was

entered into the table (Table 1). The reading age data that were available was entered into a separate table (Table 2).

Establishing a method for handling the content and processes from the open-ended discussion episodes to bring out essential patterns was not so easy a task. The technique finally used to investigate the content of the children's communications was an adapted form of content analysis (Budd, Thorp & Donohew 1967).

Full transcripts of the audiotaped discussions in the three episodes across the three groups (J, L, and S) were made first (see Appendix 2). The lines were sequentially numbered for ease of reference. The tapes were generally of high technical quality but some data were lost when the children failed to follow the instruction to speak clearly and one at a time! Some indication of affective expression is given in brackets in the transcripts or by using italics where a significant emphasis was placed on a word. Nevertheless, the transcripts cannot do justice to the gestalt of all that was said and done.

In order to differentiate the content of the transcripts, the data from the children's interpretations of the seven parables were coded into qualitative categories identifying and isolating themes, patterns and meanings. How these categorized elements relate to parable content was then presented in matrices, one for each parable (Patton 1990:416). No differences were distinguished among the three groups or between sub - groups formed by gender, ethnicity etc. Characters, objects and actions in each of the parables are listed along the left side of the matrix. Explanations given by the children are listed across the top.

The cross-classification of theme and interpretation produced a cell in the matrix. In each cell formed a cross was placed to indicate a linkage between

parable content and the meaning the children attributed to the respective content. The crosses do not show the frequency with which certain linkages occur. The matrices thus present a kind of composite reading.

All tabulation was carried out by hand.

The resulting seven matrices (Tables 4 to 10) provided the basis for the discussion in Chapter 4 of the first research question.

Once the analysis was completed of the sense the learners made of significant aspects of the parables, a second descriptive analysis of the transcript data was made to identify the hermeneutic processes that emerged. In order to direct this analysis of process I used the eight categories I have already put forward in Chapter 1 (p 18). The answers to the eight questions proposed there were not reduced to matrices but are the focus of the qualitative analysis in Chapter 4 that addresses the second research question.

Having described the components of the procedures used in the design of this study, we turn next to a presentation of the research findings themselves.

CHAPTER 3

Results

The presentation of the data obtained in this study is in two parts. In *Part 1* are the tabulated summaries of the analysis of the responses to the questions on the Learner Profile Questionnaire (Tables 1 & 2) together with a table of available mean Reading Age scores of the participants from a reading experience test (Table 3). Following, in *Part 2*, are summaries in the form of matrices of the children's responses to the content of the seven parables in Matthew 13.

Part 1

Table 1 is the summary of the demographic data from the Learner Profile Questionnaire (LPQ): sex, age, first language and church denomination, both for the sample ($n= 13$) and for each of the discussion groups (designated J, L, and S) into which the sample was sub - divided.

TABLE 1
SUMMARY TABLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Group	J	L	S	Sample
Participants	3	5	5	n = 13
Sex: Male	1	3	2	6
Female	2	2	3	7
Mean Age	10y 10m	11y 7m	10y 10m	11y 1m
First Language:				
Afrikaans	-	-	1	1
English	2	3	4	9
Zulu	1	2	-	3
Denomination:				
Baptist	-	1	1	2
Church of England (SA)	-	2	1	3
Independent Pentacostal	1	-	-	1
Methodist	-	1	1	2
Mormon (LDS)	1	-	1	2
Roman Catholic	1	-	-	1
Seventh Day Adventist	-	-	1	1
None	-	1	-	1

The data in Table 1 are self-explanatory and have been discussed already in the description of the Subjects in the previous chapter (p.23). Two pieces of information which add to the profile of the child readers require further comment. First, the surprisingly higher mean age (11y 7m) for Group L whose age range was 10y 4m to 12y 9m. At the top of this range was a learner of 12y 9m who had started school late and who had repeated a year. The extreme

TABLE 2
SCORES FOR READING EXPERIENCE OF PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Group	J	L	S	Sample n = 13
Reading Age (RA): Mean (RA):	10y 7m	10y 4m	11y 11m	10y 0m

value for his chronological age distorted the mean age for Group L. Secondly, it should be noted that of the thirteen children in the study only one stated that he did not belong to any church grouping. No examination was made of the undoubted biasing effect of religious affiliation on the children's interpretations. As mentioned earlier (p.24), such associations were outside the scope of the research questions addressed here.

It should be noted also that the attributions of ethnicity discussed earlier (p.23) were not from the LPQ but were provided by the class teachers concerned and consequently are not included in Table 1.

Table 2 above was also discussed in the previous chapter under the head of the participants' level of literacy (p.28).

To get some measure of the children's Christian religious practices three questions on the LPQ sought information on three areas: the frequency of the children's church or Sunday school attendance, whether they belonged to a bible study group or not, and the frequency with which they actually read the Bible. See Table 3 for a display of the exact questions asked and the distribution of responses as raw scores and percentages of the total responses.

TABLE 3 <i>DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ON ITEMS ON CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES</i>				
1. How often do you go to Church or Sunday School?				
Nearly every week.	At least once a month.	Sometimes.	Once or twice a year.	Never.
6 (46%)	-	2 (15%)	1 (8%)	4 (31%)
2. How often do you read the Bible?				
Nearly every week.	At least once a month.	Sometimes.	Once or twice a year.	Never.
2 (15%)	4 (31%)	5 (39%)	-	2 (15%)
3. Do you belong to a Bible Study Group?				
Yes	No			
5 (38%)	8 (62%)			
4. Do you think the Bible Stories really happened?				
Yes, all of it happened.	Most of it really Happened.	Some of it Really happened.	Very little of it really happened.	No, none of it really happened.
9 (69%)	4 (31%)	-	-	-

The data presented above in Table 3 seem to support the following observations.

Question 1: A substantial number of the children, though not the majority, are actively involved in church life, as indicated by the responses to the first question. Table 1 shows the seven denominations the children belonged to and

where those children who attend church or Sunday school, either frequently or not, might be found

Questions 2 & 3: The responses to question 2 are consistent with the above observation: of the approximately 46% of children regularly attending church or Sunday school, about the same number also regularly read the Bible. A number of these children, about a third, also responded affirmatively to belonging to a Bible study group.

Question 4: Results from question 4, suggested by Peatling's Literalism Scale (Degelman, Mullen & Mullen: 1984), gave some assessment of the children's understanding of Bible stories on the spectrum from literal to non-literal. All thirteen children expressed the belief that *all* or *most* of the stories in the Bible narrate events that *really happened*. This suggests high approbation given to the accuracy of the Bible by the children in this group and an inclination on their part to think of the Bible as authoritative.

Question 5: Included in the introductory LPQ was a final question requesting a written definition of a parable. The question was included because the investigator considered it a critical biblical-theological term used in the study (as also did Turner in his 1978 construction of the *Religious Language Comprehension Test*). Further, it was important to get some sense of how a parable was operating in the research participants' time and context. Unlike the other questions, this one could not be displayed in a table. Instead, a qualitative assessment of the children's responses against one Bible dictionary definition (Crossan 1992) was made to throw some light on the children's degree of understanding of the parable genre and some of the associations it has in their minds.

Five of the respondents showed a marked agreement in defining parable as 'a story' e.g. 'A parable is a story Jesus told the people.' An equal number

identified a parable as a part of the Bible or from biblical days e.g. 'A parable is something to do with Bible days'. One child described a parable as 'something that is true' and two confessed that they 'really don't know' what a parable is.

When compared with Crossan's (1992) definition it is evident that, on the whole, the children are aware of the narrative quality of parable and of its use in biblical times but have not expressed any awareness of the parabolic elements of brevity and metaphor nor of the general didactic purpose of the genre. In the event, however, the children showed an understanding of how metaphor works and intuitively saw its relevance to the understanding of a parable.

Since the discussion of the parables by the children was not intended to be a 'treatment' variable for their notion of parable, no pre- and post-discussion differences were measured.

So much for an indication of the position from which the children set out to explore the seven assigned parables.

Part 2

Data analysis for the transcripts of each of the three reading Episodes across the three groups of children consisted first of coding the 'meaning' units in the transcript text. 'Meaning' unit is used here as a general label. It corresponds roughly to everything said by a speaker in the discussions in the act of assigning meaning and consists of a single word or group of word. In using this unit of analysis I have been constantly aware of its vagueness when compared to the more rigorous definition of units used by linguists in discourse analysis. The meaning units identified were then organized into categories on the basis of their similarity.

As described earlier in Chapter 2 (pp. 33 & 34) a matrix was used to draw together and link the meanings the children assigned to the elements in each of the parables read and the elements themselves. The two-dimensional matrix construct used below thus crosses the 'elements' dimension with what the children indicated these elements to 'mean'.

It is important to repeat that the matrices provide only descriptive classifications and depict the general patterns of meaning the children gave to their readings of each parable. No frequency weightings are given to individual cross - classification cells in the matrices which now follow overleaf.

TABLE 4
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

[illegible]

TABLE 5
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PARABLE OF THE WEEDS

	God	Jesus	Belong to Jesus	Believers in God	The World	Heaven	Darkness - Satan	Ugly People	Satan / Devil	Someone Evil	Believers in the Devil	God's word learnt	Enjoy life	Hearing God's work	To save wheat	Think before doing	Give a chance	To see a difference	End of World	Angels	To seperate	Into hell	Jesus' house / heart	God's heart
A man	X	X																						
Sowed good seed			X	X																				
In his field					X	X																		
One night							X																	
Enemy sowed								X	X	X														
Weeds									X	X														
Ears form / grow											X													
Servants												X	X	X										
Pull up (weeds)															X									
Might pull (wheat)																X								
Grow together																	X	X						
Harvest																		X						
Harvest workers		X							X											X				
Weed first																					X			
Burn																						X		
Gather wheat																							X	
Put in barn																							X	X

TABLE 6
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

[illegible]

[illegible][illegible]

TABLE 8
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATIONS
AND THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

[illegible]

TABLE 9
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S
INTERPRETATIONS AND THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL

[illegible]

TABLE 10
MATRIX OF LINKAGES BETWEEN THE CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATIONS AND THE
PARABLE OF THE NET

[illegible]

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter I set out to address the discussion of my findings directly to the two research questions posed in Chapter 1. It will be recalled that the first question is concerned with the sense the children make of the parables they read and the second with the children's hermeneutical processes and strategies.

To start, I propose to describe the communal reading of each of the seven parable texts that has emerged in the matrices from the analysis of the transcripts of my fieldwork audio-recordings (Appendix 2). As I outline the children's readings I shall bring them into dialogue with three other readings from the scholarly guild of interpreters of Matthew. A word first about this latter 'critical testing'.

Critical Testing

There is a long line of eminent commentaries on Matthew to choose from for dialogue with the children's insights. To have read them all before choosing three to use in this study would have been almost a lifetime occupation so I have resorted to the practical course of choosing three relatively recent commentators whose writings were among those readily available to me. The selection of recent commentaries was to draw on scholarship in touch with contemporary biblical study. The choice was also intended to include work from an ecumenical group representing scholars from Protestant (two commentaries) and Catholic (one commentary) faith backgrounds and the work of scholars approaching the parables from three different critical perspectives. First is Patte (1987), in the structural tradition, secondly Stock (1994), who provides a narrative criticism and, thirdly, Jones (1995), whose commentary on the parables is from a literary and historical perspective.

In following this process I am not attempting to bring a consensus among the four readings, a sort of 'sum' that is a 'right' reading, but rather to make a comparison and contrast of the insights from the different contexts of my 'ordinary' child readers and the three 'academic' exegetes who use the variety of critical methods mentioned above. Nor am I attributing a normative status to the three exegetes. I am not intending an evaluation of the worth or the correctness of the children's readings against the criteria of scholarly readings; there is also no intention of ascertaining which readings show the greater accuracy or moral and doctrinal acceptability. I am entering the three exegetes' readings into a 'conversation', so to speak, with the readings of the children who participated in this study.

THE CHILDREN'S READINGS

EPIISODE 1

The setting - Matthew 13:1-3a

Two groups, J and S, totally ignore the partial social and geographic setting Matthew gives here in which the first four parables are told to the gathered crowd. In this, these two groups are joined by Stock (1994) who makes no comment on the opening reference to Jesus' location. Group L, however, refers to the setting three times: first, when a child expresses puzzlement over why Jesus should leave the house. No one offers any reasons for this to the questioner. Patte (1987), however, does offer a reason. He regards the change in location as the beginning of a new part of the section begun in Matthew 9:35. He also shows how the temporal phrase 'that same day' makes a connection with the preceding account and situates the parable in the context of Jesus' conflict with the Pharisees. Secondly, (ll. 112-120), the children in Group L try to establish the reason for Jesus sitting in the boat. They seem to be groping for some symbolic significance in this particular of Jesus' location but in the end accept Matthew's explanation (v.2). They do not show any awareness of the fact that by sitting Jesus was adopting the normal posture for a teacher. Nor are they aware that the whole setting is 'a highly traditional [one] for a narrative of public proclamation' (Jones 1995: 296). Thirdly, (ll. 164-187), they attempt to separate the parable of the Sower from these introductory verses. Their initial confusion is over the identities of Jesus as teller of the story and the 'man' who is the protagonist in the parable itself. They eventually locate the whole event in the past and separate Jesus as the storyteller (l.181) from 'a man who' (l.180), the sower.

Verse 3a is not mentioned directly but the discussion of all the groups indicates an implicit acceptance of a metaphoric level of reference in the parable form. As one speaker has it (l.193) 'the story *means* something'. We have already noted the children's understanding of what a parable is in the discussion of their definitions (pp. 39 & 40). The brevity of these definitions contrasts markedly with the scholars' discursive discussions of the parable form. Jones (1995: 56-109), for example, devotes a whole chapter to the question: What is a parable?

The Parable of the Sower - Matthew 13: 3b-9

Later in Group S's discussion a child makes the comparison 'the man that scattered...was like Jesus' (l.222). The rest of the group express their general agreement with this. The children share their identification with both Stock (1994:213) (who generally follows the interpretation given in Matthew 13: 18-23), and with Patte (1987). Since there is nothing in the parable itself or in its interpretation (vv. 18-23) to suggest the identification of the sower with Jesus, it is possible that this idea was prompted by a memory of the allegorical treatment of the parable of the Weeds given later in Chapter 13 (v.37). Or it is conceivable, though there is no hard evidence in the data, that Jesus going out of the house to teach and the sower going out to sow pointed the children to the identification of the sower as Jesus.

The seed which the man sows is also first pictured as Jesus, though this identification is immediately recanted by the same speaker and corrected to 'us'. Another child goes on to refer to the seed as 'people'. Both presumably mean human beings. Once more this interpretation seems to have its source in the explanation of the parable of the Weeds (v.38). The corn which is sowed is misidentified as the South African mealie or sweetcorn. It was more likely to have been wheat or barley. Although the seed is acknowledged as a central

image in this parable (Jones 1995) and appears as such to the children, only Stock (1994), again following Matthew 13:18-23, recalls that it there represents 'the message about the kingdom'.

The middle-eastern method of sowing does not appear to be familiar to the children although they seem to understand 'scattered' as broadcasting seed over an area of land in their rephrasings 'planted about' and 'dropped'. It is unlikely, however as one child insists, that the sower was 'careful' (l.93) about where he sowed his seeds. The sower might have been 'clumsy', as Jeremias (1996: 9) would have it, though I would have thought that the practised sower was more likely to have been deft in scattering his seed. In any event, the sowing in one field containing both good and poor soil is probably explainable at least at the literal level by the fact that sowing often preceded ploughing so where the sower scattered the seed on the unploughed stubble would have been of no great concern.

Turning to the three failures of sowing (Table 4) which Jones (1995) regards as failures to respond, we note that two explanations are given for the seeds that fall on the path: they represent those who 'didn't believe in God', and those who 'didn't even *start* believing in God' which closely parallels what Patte (1987: 189) characterizes as those who do not even hear the word let alone understand it. The children do not attribute any reason for this as Stock (1994:213) does. He sees the failure to understand the word as the heart (again referring to Matthew 13:19) 'not fulfilling its spiritual role'. One additional response (Table 4) suggests that the seed on the path is literally those on the wrong track. Two possible explanations are also given by the children for the birds that eat the seed: they are Satan alone, even though the plural does not suggest a solitary figure, or, by those paying more attention to the plural, Satan and his minions. None of the three commentators has any discussion of the image of the birds.

The seed on rocky ground is felt just to be put in the wrong place. Interestingly, the failure here is thus, for the children, a failure of the *sower* not rather than what Patte (1987) sees as a failure of the *receiver*, the soil. For Patte, the threefold scenes of failure are differentiated from the successful scene by what is *done* with the word (Patte 1987:189). There is, however, a recognition of this latter point when the children see the sprouting of the seed as a short lived belief in God (Table 4). The effects of the sun are represented as subsequent tiredness or forgetfulness sapping belief. The soil's lack of depth and the consequent shallow rooting is, as Stock (1994: 214) points out, a traditional image of instability' or 'transitoriness'. For the children too it is the shallowness of the soil that is the important point and not the underlying rockiness. The image of shallow soil is an indication of belief without love or a love that isn't deep (Table 4), conveying something of the thought in Matthew 13: 20-21, where the word is heard and received with joy but is not followed by a commitment to cost (Patte 1987). We shall return to this scene when we look below at its illustration in the parables of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast.

The seed among the thorn bushes is also seen as being scattered in the wrong place. A variety of views is given about the thorn bushes themselves. They are seen as choking doubts, or suffering which the believer is unwilling to bear, or as agents which cause initial belief to be abandoned (Table 4). This scene is also illustrated later but in the parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl.

None of these statements can be equated with the dangers of commitment posed by wealth or mammon in Stock (1994), when referring to the 'love of riches' in Matthew 13:22, but are reminiscent of his recasting of 'worries' as 'subjective experience' (p.214). Both 'worries' and 'love of riches', like the children's representations of the weeds, hold humans in thrall to this world.

Discussion is then directed to what Jones (1995) describes as the other central picture of the parable, the harvest. Here the children first interpret the seed on

the good soil as those who 'believe(d)' or, more explicitly, those who 'believe(d) properly' (Table 4). What the seeds produce, a decisive point in this scene, is interpreted as 'being nice people' or 'obedience' or internal 'goodness' (Table 4). This latter view is much the same as the traditional one that it is in the heart that the will is established (Patte 1987). As Stock (1994:213) puts it, the heart is 'not fulfilling its spiritual role'.

The children go on to speak of the three different numerical dimensions given in v.8 (Matthew 13) of the yields from the harvest as indications of different degrees of 'goodness' attained. The smaller quantities being those who are 'getting there...nearly' (Table 4) or, as another child quaintly puts it, 'the okay but still(s)' (l. 211). The hundred fold yield is those who are 'there' and presumably the quality indicated by 'there' is the previously mentioned 'goodness'. Stock (1994:214) has a similar but finer differentiated view of these quantities. The *hundred grains* represent those ready to 'sacrifice property and soul', the *sixty grains* are those ready to give up 'goods only', and the *thirty grains* are those who have 'obedient and undivided' hearts but are unwilling to give up either 'property or life'. Here Stock is not following Jesus' concise explanation in Matthew 13:23. For Patte (1987:185), the decreasing quantities of yield from the harvest, though 'all outstanding', indicate that the harvest is not 'an unmitigated success'. However, for Jones (1995, 298-9), even the yield of a *hundred grains* is 'unsurprising' in the contemporary world of Jesus. He sees the reference to the decreasing scale of the yield as a Matthaean concern 'that the powers of evil could pose a danger to Christian commitment and obedience'.

For one child the point of all this is that 'a couple of seeds go a long way' and later, more emphatically, 'a very long way'. It is not difficult to see how this fundamental assertion attempting a summary of the point of the parable of the Sower could be justified. It is a summary likely to be accepted by other interpreters (especially as it relates to the 'small to great' contrast in other

parables in the chapter) or, for example, by Stock (1994) with reference to the seed bearing *abundant* fruit in the interpretation (v.23).

Listen, then... - Matthew 13:9

As with the setting in verses 1-3a, it is again only two groups (this time Group L, ll. 30-44 & 84-90, and Group S, (ll 207 & ll. 228-230) who spend any time discussing Jesus' ending to the parable of the Sower. Group L particularly highlights the call to attention in the use of 'then' in this verse which is noteworthy since they have focussed on a word Matthew uses frequently. One child asks: 'Why can't it just be *listen*?' (l. 86) and another senses a hint of anger in the added 'then'. Generally, though, 'then' evokes for the children the injunction of a parent or teacher to them to listen *very* carefully when spoken to, especially when it is God's word which is being spoken (l.199). And the reason for this that emerges in the discussion is that God's word has a meaning (l. 89), a deeper meaning which listeners may need or wish to hear (l.43) or are obliged to hear (l.228). In this latter instance, there is in the statement in line 44 a stressed distinction between those *compelled* to listen because they have 'got ears' and those who *cannot* hear because they 'don't have ears'. Surely there is in this statement at least a glimmer of the distinction Jesus is making between those disciples who are given the ability to hear and understand and those who hear and do not understand the word of the kingdom?

We pass over the reason why Jesus told parables and the explanation of the parable of the Sower, both of which were available to the children in the open Bible before them but which were not on their photocopies, and move on to the discussions of the next parable, the parable of the Weeds.

EPISODE 2

The Parable of the Weeds - Matthew 13:24-30

Only one group (J) opens the discussion of the parable of the Weeds, which Stock (1994: 223) regards as a response to the questions raised in verse 4 (Mt 13), with a brief reflection on 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like this' (v.24) which indicates once again that the children understand that a comparison is being made. None of the groups sees any assertion in this phrase about 'God's kingly rule' (Stock 1994: 223). Nor do any of the groups remark on the addressees of this parable, the crowds and the disciples, or distinguish between the two groups as Patte does. To the crowds Jesus is giving 'basic knowledge' of the kingdom and to the disciples 'the mysteries' of the kingdom which the parables reveal but for which the crowds are not ready (Patte 1987:188).

The children's speculations about the sower ('man') in this parable conclude that he is either God or Jesus (Table 5). While there are no comments about the sower in this parable in the three scholarly works, the earlier remarks about Jesus being the sower in the parable of that name clearly still hold here (Stock 1994; Patte 1987).

The children's conclusion about the 'good seed' is that it denotes those who either 'belong to Jesus' or are 'believers in God'. This time (cf. the seed in the Sower) their characterization of the seed as human beings accords with Matthew's allegorization of this detail in the explanation of the parable of the Weeds (v.38). The seed is now not the *word* of the kingdom 'whose growth may result in harvest' (Stock 1994: 311). The children see the field where both the good seed and the weeds are sown as either 'heaven' or 'the world' (Table 5). Their understanding of the field as the world follows Jones (1994). He elaborates on this by adding that the world in mind is the area of responsibility

before the Last Days which is of 'unexpected range' (Jones 1995: 322).

When the children come to the 'weeds' they are, by contrast, believers in the devil (Table 5). The night which hides the actions of the enemy sowing the weeds is seen as Satan's darkness. It appears that the children also look upon this night sowing as a 'hidden work' (Patte 1987:198) but not explicitly concerning 'the dangers which threaten the harvest while the sower sleeps' (Jones 1995: 312).

The villain of the parable, the enemy who sowed the weeds, is reckoned by the children to be 'believers in the devil', or 'ugly people' and are also equated with Satan or the devil (Table 5) and thus are all in opposition to the man who sowed the good seed. Here the children uncover a 'narrative opposition' (Patte : 1987) though they do not express it in the same terms that Patte does when he discusses this as the first of 'four narrative oppositions' he recognizes in the parable of the Weeds (Patte 1987: 196-197). To this identification of the enemy by the children may be added Group J's efforts to uncover the enemy's motives for sowing the weeds among the wheat and Group L's concern over how the servants knew about this action. One child, for instance, gives an anachronistic embellishment by suggesting that the enemy activities under cover of darkness may have been captured on a 'special video camera' (l. 389). A consideration of the phrase 'when everyone was asleep', which the children ignore, might have alerted them to some possible answers to the questions they raise about the undetected sowing of the weeds. In Jones's study, 'sleep' in this phrase is characterized as 'laxity' and 'irresponsibility' (Jones 1995: 320). Also suggested by sleep are the 'dangers which threaten the harvest' (p.312) and indicates that an element of human responsibility is also needed for a successful harvest.

At the next stage in the story, when the ears of corn begin to appear, the children think of a time when God's word has been heard (quite literally for one child, l. 483, by the 'ears' of corn) and subsequently learnt and life is being

enjoyed (Table 5). The indistinguishable weeds ('like *us*' l. 493) not only grow alongside the wheat in the same field, they are also an active influence on the wheat: the weeds are Satan trying to bring believers in God under his control (l. 491). Contrariwise, the people represented by the wheat are influencing towards God (l. 497-499) the belief and thought of those represented by the weeds. It appears from this reciprocal influence that the children look upon the wheat and weeds growing together here as unlike the growth pattern of the wheat and weeds in the previous parable. In perceiving a *difference* they are in agreement with Jones (1995). Where the children part company with Jones is in the nature of the difference in growth patterns. Jones (1995: 311) sees the difference in the extent of the inhibitory effect of the weeds: only *some* wheat is affected by the weeds in the parable of the Sower.

The children do not attribute any identity to the servants and nor do the commentators though Stock notes that the servants have 'little personal autonomy' (Stock 1994: 226). Patte (1987) points out (in this his second 'narrative opposition' of servants *and* the man) that the servants are 'not aware of the enemy's role'. As the man reveals to the servants in a new element introduced into the parables here, it is 'an enemy at the origin of evil' (Patte 1987: 194). This insight into verse 27 would no doubt have helped the children with their earlier queries about why the sowing of the weeds went unobserved.

The man's response (v.29) to his servants' query and proposal (Stock 1994) concerning what was to be done about the growing weeds is seen by the children as a reflection of Jesus offering unbelievers 'a chance' to 'start believing' (Table 5). This suggests that those who made these statements recognize at least something of Matthew's call to the mercy of God's reign (e.g. 5:45), though they overlook the difficulty that the character given to the weeds is fixed in their origin. As Patte (1987: 194) explains, the servants' timing is wrong. Now is the time for mercy and hence the man's command to 'let...both grow together until harvest' (v.30). Such a concern that none might be lost

corresponds also, if only implicitly, with Stock's view that the man's response to his servants shows 'a concern for the church's missionary outreach' (Stock: 1994: 226). What the children do not sense (in this third 'narrative opposition') is any 'opposition' of the servants in thinking they know what the man wants done (Patte 1987:229). Further, the children believe, that a period for 'wheat' and 'weeds' to grow side by side to maturity would give the differences distinguishing them a better chance of appearing (Table 5).

There is a marked understanding in Group S of the eschatological echoes in the final events in this parable. These events they portray as a future 'end of the world' when the 'angels' or 'Jesus' take the good people and the devil takes the 'weeds' and make a clear separation of those going 'into hell' and those going to the 'house' of Jesus or to the 'heart', represented by the barn, of God (Table 5). Here again the children may be using memories of the interpretation of the parable (vv. 36-43) as the source of their ideas though they did not refer to the passage in question during their discussions.

Group J, however, takes a strictly literal line with verse 30 and attempts rather to formulate a summary of the overall meaning of the parable. Two statements result. First, 'don't expect what you think is going to happen' (I.310) and, secondly, that the parable teaches that you must think before you do anything (I. 326). Group L makes nothing of verse 30 but also attempts two summary statements. Remarkably, they concur with the finding of Group J that the parable of the Weeds means 'think twice before you do something' (I.413) and add, secondly, that 'everybody's got something of their own, they're good at' (I.411). The note of restraint conveyed here to refrain from judgement before the time seems to capture neatly an essential thought in this parable.

After a short break , the children were given two more parables to examine in the rest of this second Episode of discussion: the parable of the Mustard Seed

and the parable of the Leaven. The summary analyses of these discussions are given in the previous chapter in Tables 6 and 7 respectively.

The Parable of the Mustard Seed - Matthew 13:31-32

The children do not make any link between this short tale in combined parable-similitude form (Jones 1995: 324) and the second group of inadequate hearers (v.5) introduced in the parable of the Sower. Stock (1994: 227), on the other hand, finds in the parable of the Mustard Seed an answer to the questions raised in that scene in the Sower. Patte (1987: 195) likewise finds in this parable of the Mustard Seed a 'thematic development of the preceding points' but for him it is especially in respect of the parable of the Weeds.

Unlike the discussions of the previous parable, Jesus' introductory phrase 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like this' (v.31) gets the brief attention of *all three* groups. This response to the parable introduction suggests that its repetition is making itself heard and alerting the children to its significance and subtleties. The child introducing the discussion in Group J clearly understands, if not clearly expresses the idea, that 'like' in this phrase indicates a comparison between the Kingdom of Heaven and what follows in the parable (Il. 274-275). The child who introduces the discussion on this phrase in Group L also apprehends the idea of a comparison but goes a step further. It is a comparison intended to show what 'our world is supposed to be like' (I.422). In this comment the child reiterates one of the historical interpretations of the Kingdom of Heaven (Duling 1992: 49). And in Group S, the child introducing the discussion finds in the comparison a reference to God and that the phrase is 'something to do with heaven, spiritual...' (Il. 543-544).

The parable itself does not generate a lot of commentary. The man who sows is once again seen as God, but not also as Jesus (Stock 1994: 228) and no link is made with the sowers in the previous two parables or, more particularly, with the man in the previous parable (Stock 1994). The children's central concern is the size of the mustard seed. This is understood as a reference to worthlessness or a limit to what one can be good at and yet, as a seed, it contains the potential for growth. The children also recognize in the growth of the small seed into a large plant the notion of a reversal of expectations which they illustrate with real-life examples. At this point in the children's discussions I sensed their growing awareness of some of the rich associations of growth and/or contrast in the symbol of the seeds and tree. Moving outside the story to their own lives, as mentioned above, the children repeatedly make the point that insignificant beginnings have the potential for growth, a growth in goodness, love, strength of self-worth, and faith in God (Table 6). Their emphasis on what happens at the end of the powerful process of growth accords with the emphasis in the parable itself where the essential comparison is between the Kingdom of Heaven and the fully grown mustard bush, 'the biggest of all plants' (v.32). Understandably perhaps for ten year-olds, the children do not recognize the fully grown tree as an emblematic metaphor giving a 'missionary or universal emphasis' (Jones 1995: 323) to Matthew 13.

There are several ways (Table 6) in which the children understand the birds that nest in the branches of the large mustard plant but none of these approaches the use of birds as an Old Testament image for a mighty empire or uncovers any veiled reference to the Gentiles (Stock 1994: 228). In one instance (Table 6) the birds are seen as 'people wanting to learn about God' and in another as 'sharing', though what exactly they are sharing in is not clarified. One child gives the twin identities of 'priest and prophet' to the birds and we can only speculate on the depth of the implications of these designations. Perhaps the child intended no more than to repeat a phrase heard in a biblical context elsewhere. And, yet again, a child introduces a curious summary of this parable that it is a

warning against greed and an unwillingness to share possessions with others. 'It's telling you not to be greedy' (l.421) and in an amplification, the same child gives an example of one person with lunch not being greedy and sharing it with another person who hasn't any.

The Parable of the Yeast - Matthew 13:33

There is no information in any of the discussions of this parable that points to a link the children may have made to the second group of inadequate hearers (v.7) in the parable of the Sower. In this matter, Stock (1994) repeats the position he takes on the parable of the Mustard Seed that the questions raised in verse 7 in the parable of the Sower are answered here (v.33).

Once again, all three groups make brief references to Jesus' introductory formula 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like this' (Table 7). Group J and Group L do not add anything to their previous understanding of the phrase and repeat what they have said earlier. Group S, however, clarifies (l.576) its previous somewhat vague comment that the phrase is 'something to do with heaven, spiritual...'. In this parable, and presumably in the others read so far, they now regard Jesus' relating of the parables as 'trying to tell...what heaven is like' (l. 576). The kingdom of heaven now seems to be literally that of the heavens.

The woman in the parable is for one group an angel and no mention is made in any of the Groups' discussions of the woman being a surrogate for God or Jesus.

The yeast that the woman uses, which arouses most of the discussion of this pericope, is seen variously as a strengthening ingredient, as God, angels, goodness, or teaching the Bible (Table 7). In all these attributions the children convey something of the idea of the positive effectiveness of the yeast and of

its transforming power. The flour itself, with particular reference to its quantity which they sense is large, represents many people or heaven growing bigger (Table 7) again underlining growth and success. However, unlike in the parable of the Mustard Seed, the children do not mention and perhaps do not see any contrast between the small amount of yeast and the magnitude of its effectiveness. The commentators do not lose sight of this contrast. As they say, the power of the yeast, despite its smallness, is not 'overwhelmed' (Patte 1987) by the flour but is 'penetrating' (Stock 1994) and 'total' (Jones 1995). So, from its small hidden beginning 'the kingdom will succeed in affecting and transforming all that seems to threaten it' (Patte 1987: 195). For Group L, though, the flour is a large quantity so that it can be shared (L.440). Mixing the yeast into the flour is regarded as an action of sharing and consequently as a sign of lack of greed (Table 7).

The dough rising (Table 7) is seen as increasing learning, especially about God, as well as an increasing number of people who believe in God and are becoming more faithful to him. It is interesting to note that for one child (the rest of the group reject the notion) the action of rising evokes memories of Jesus' resurrection in the Easter story (ll. 377-378). In this perception she may possibly be on the way to the further thought that the yeast can influence and bring about change only under the condition that it first 'dies' in the dough (Stock 1994).

A photocopy of the text of the homily on the Parable of the Weeds (Mt 13:36b-43) was, as indicated earlier, not given to the children to discuss though a copy was available to them in the open Bible on the table they sat around. They were, however, given verse 36a as an introduction to the three parables (Mt 13:44-50) to be discussed in their final session together, Episode 3.

EPISODE 3

The Parable of the Hidden Treasure - Matthew 13: 36a & 44

None of the groups touch on the change in Jesus' location and audience (v.36a) for the last three parables. Patte (1987), though, indicates that Jesus' relocation to the 'house', which the GNB renders 'indoors', separates the discourse which follows from the rest. He adds that in now addressing the disciples alone, the reader should anticipate a 'revelation of the mysteries' (p.198); the 'present' and 'positive' ministry of Jesus which 'involves showing people how to discover what is hidden' (Patte 1987:196 &198). This way of understanding the new location and restricted audience is not dealt with in any way by the children.

Nor do any of the groups comment on the opening to the parable. In omitting any discussion of this (Table 8) they miss the significance of the change in the comparison: that the Kingdom of Heaven is now likened to 'that which a person operates' (Jones 1995: 346). The emphasis is on what people *do* (Patte 1987: 198).

Groups J and L find this parable especially difficult to interpret. They get bogged down at the literal level in some confusion over the sequence of the story and the ownership of the field. They do, however, regard the treasure as 'something adorable' (l. 619) and see it standing for God, and the uncovering of the treasure is in effect 'finding God' (l. 789). Group J identifies the treasure with Jesus (Table 8). These first two responses give expression to something close to what Stock (1994) observes about how, in the Old Testament, God and what he gives - himself, among other things- is compared to treasure. It is a treasure which, in these terms, may indeed seem 'something adorable'.

To return to covering up the treasure, the man is also seen to be protecting it from the attacks of evil as well as jealously guarding it out of greed (Table 8). Besides wanting to explain why the man should hide the treasure again, Group S is alone in its concern about the morality of his action. The view is that the man shouldn't cover the treasure up again once he has discovered 'everything about God', he should reveal this knowledge 'so that everyone else can learn about God' (ll. 793-802). For Jones (1995: 347) this hiding the treasure shows the man's 'awareness of the moral and legal difficulties of possessing the treasure'.

When it comes to the reason for the man selling everything he has, the children's explanations do not at first refer to the field at all (Table 8). They do not read into the man's actions that he realizes that the treasure in the field is worth more than all else in life. They feel, somewhat incongruously, that the man was probably only getting rid of excess possessions and cite as reasons for this his desire to buy something other than the field such as, for example, tools. One response, however, suggests that the money was for something 'unusual' and the child possibly had in mind the treasure in the field. In the end, the children come to an understanding that the man sells everything in order to buy the field. This is, they say, so that he can be close to God and to learn about God who is 'the treasure' of great value. The children do not add that the man's action in selling everything shows an unreserved and full commitment to obtaining the one thing desired (Stock 1994; Jones 1995), what Patte describes as the 'ultimate good' (Patte 1987: 198).

The Parable of the Pearl - Matthew 13:45-46

Two children, one in Group J and one in Group S, consider this parable to be a pair with the parable of the Hidden Treasure. This perception they share with the commentators but the children do not go on to detail the similarities. For the

commentators, the context is again commercial, the emphasis is on what a person does, though a somewhat more active and decisive 'looking' here than the simple chance occurrence of 'finding', but again an opportunity and a responsibility for a response of unreserved commitment (Patte 1987; Stock 1994; Jones 1995).

Despite the general sense of similarity the children share with the commentators, they seem unable to decide whether the man's discovery of the pearl is accidental or not and they leave the question unresolved. Also, they make an unusual reversal of their interpretation of the treasure-pearl parallel. The treasure in the previous parable was seen as God but now, the treasure in the form of a pearl, becomes identified as 'anyone'. And, since the pearl is 'unusually fine', it is more specifically identified as Christians, people who don't sin, or someone special, particularly 'precious' children, and even Jesus on the cross. (Table 9). The exceptional quality of the pearl is not seen as a reflection of the value of the kingdom and the kingdom's values (Jones 1995: 348).

The man's motivation for selling 'everything he has' is once again, and rather strangely in the light of the above, to get something other than the pearl itself. In the children's interpretation the man's reason for selling everything is to get rich or to buy a house which seems to be a perpetuation of old values rather than their undoing and reversal (Jones 1995: 352).

After a short break the last parable, the parable of the Net, was handed out to the children. It was separated in this way from the two parables used earlier in this Episode because it 'brings together several preceding themes' (Patte 1987: 198). For Stock (1994: 239), a particular question the parable of the Net raises is why all people of God are not adequate hearers: the seed on good soil in the Sower. Again, the children do not say anything about this link.

The Parable of the Net - Matthew 13:47-50

The children omit any reference to the opening phrase (of v.47) in this parable, in all likelihood because they had exhausted all they wanted to say about it in their previous discussions. They move directly to the main characters, the fishermen. Whereas these fishermen are, in the children's view, intermediaries of divine activity, God's servants or his angels (Table 10), the three commentators do not give any distinctive identity to them.

No explanation is given by the children for the seining the fishermen are engaged in but for the lake where they drag their nets, the children read 'the world' (Table 10) though the parable itself gives no hint to what is figured by the net or the lake. Out of this 'world' the servants or angels will gather the good and the bad together. This activity on the lake could also be understood as 'Jesus' ministry and the Kingdom of the Son of man which includes righteous and evildoers' (Patte 1987: 99).

Who do the fish of 'all kinds' represent? They are understood by the children to be human beings of different sorts and particularly 'us' (Table 10), referring most likely to the children speaking in the discussion or, as mentioned above, just different kinds of people in general. In this they seem to have captured the idea that underlying Jesus' proclamation in Matthew is a challenge to both the reader and all other humans. The commentators implicitly adopt the same position though, as Stock (1994, 235) warns, 'all kinds of fish' should not be understood as *all* the fish in the sea. The shore to which these people are 'pulled' is thought of by the children as heaven (Table 10), their location for the events of the 'end of the age'.

The children make a good deal of vv. 48-50 which they explore at some length. They clearly understand Jesus to be speaking of an eschatological judgement in the sorting of the good from the bad by God's agents, the angels. In the

interpretation of the children, at the end of the world 'good people' will 'go to heaven' or 'go (to be?) with God' and that over against this, the 'worthless ones', those 'bad people' who do not care about God or love him will be separated out for punishment in hell (Table 10). This main focus on the fate of the bad (Jones: 1995, 355) does not escape the children though the last three verses do not evoke any sense of the problem of good and evil being dealt with in one institution, the church (Stock 1994: 240).

In all three groups there is discussion (J -II. 646-649; L- I. 774-776; S- II. 869-873) which expresses a quite vivid understanding of the inherent warning and admonition in Jesus' portrayal in the parable of the Net of the coming judgement.

In sum, the discussion of the results from this study presented in the preceding 'conversation' evinces striking parallels between the children and the three expert commentators. This suggests that the general shape of the children's interpretations is not entirely arbitrary, fanciful or idiosyncratic. It is an interpretation that presents the beginnings of an understanding of the kingdom of heaven that came to these children through their urge to discover meaning. The interpretation thus deserves a place on at least a preliminary plane in the hermeneutical spiral.

So much for the question in this study which addresses the need to establish first an 'understanding' of biblical text before turning to the second and complementary research question, the 'how': what mode of hermeneutical activity is at work here to achieve the children's beginning level of understanding?

THE CHILDREN'S HERMENEUTICS

As I have already noted, unravelling the children's hermeneutical processes which is the goal of my second research question is enormously complex and difficult. I have therefore restricted myself to eight dimensions from the many possible hermeneutical strategies to draw out a general understanding of the children's hermeneutical behaviour and concerns as displayed in their interpretative interaction. The dimensions are, therefore, not offered as criteria of adequacy.

Entry into the parables

The children's approach to the experience of parable was confident, energetic and with evident enjoyment. There appeared to be a willingness, even eagerness, to understand as an end in itself and not necessarily out of any conviction of faith. To all intents and purposes, the children responded to the seven parables as if they were exegetes committed to actively grappling with text put before them in order to come to know and understand it.

At no time was there any sense that the children were reading as a favour to the researcher or in the interests of scientific research. Overall, their approach was a dual one. Their main preoccupation as they paid attention to the metaphorical truths of the parables was decidedly allegorical. My prior instructions may have led to this and we shall pursue this later. However, in their exploration of the details, the children did not completely neglect the heart of parable. They also try to develop the central thought or leitmotif of some of the parables.

Is the text read as a literary unit?

From what has been said about the children's definition of parable and from their overall approach to parable, it appears that they saw this genre as a literary form characteristic of sacred written material.

I was struck by the children's self-initiated rereading of the text and their use of the text as their point of reference. Their primary and continuing concern was the content of the text itself and the problems that arose from reading it. Text was seen as something to be read and understood.

The children made an unaffected entry into the dialogic nature of hermeneutics, returning to the text again and again to read, expand, revise, illustrate, correct and raise questions. And this behaviour was not random but rather systematic as they made a serial analysis of each parable. Again, this latter behaviour may have been an effect of my instruction to go through each parable one verse at a time to work out what they thought Jesus wanted to teach.

There is encouragement here for Religious Education. These children of ten could sit before a text ready to engage with it and with one another. They could take part for themselves in the search for a measure of understanding of a sacred literary text and ultimately come to a 'meaning' of its content.

Reading is a primary handicapping condition of children in school but it did not set any limits to the subjects in this research. As expected, the particular text used did not impose unusually severe demands on reading ability. Matching the children's reading ability to the readability of an 'adult' translation of the Bible in a language that the children could readily follow appears to point away from choosing material heavily adapted to the literacy and conceptual development of particular children.

Another aspect of the children's approach to text that needs highlighting is that of omissions and misunderstandings. There are a number of phrases mentioned in the earlier discussion of the readings that the children have ignored, for example, 'the man's servants' (v.27: Table 5). Some details are also passed over by the three expert readers in this way and some are not. We cannot infer from this that the omitted phrases or words have *no* significance for the children or that they have no explanations for them. It is possible too that the children do not discuss some features of the parables because they recognize that not every detail *has* moral or theological meaning.

Sometimes clear (and possibly unintentional) misunderstandings arise. For instance, in Group J's discussion of the parable of the Sower a child finds a parallel (ll. 24-25) between the story of the Sower and that of Jacob and his sons (presumably that in Genesis 37). The child misconstrues the contrast between those represented by the seed on good and poor soils as some way similar to the contrast between the favoured Joseph and his jealous brothers. Such examples should alert us to how easily a pericope can be unintentionally misunderstood and to the points at which the children need help from an expert facilitator in their exploration of text.

A final aspect of the discussions of the text that should be noted is that the children's meaning was not entirely embedded in the literal events of each parable; they move between the literal and the allegorical. According to Goldman (1964) the interpretations by these ten year old children, ostensibly at Piaget's stage of concrete operational thought, should have been as stories which are literally true. However, the ten year old subjects in the present study appear to be able to detach themselves from the concrete situation of the parable and move beyond the literal. Not only do they have the 'ability to "decentre", or appreciate someone else's point of view' (Donaldson 1978: 30) (a depth of insight which Piagetian tradition has maintained is limited in children of this age), but they also have achieved some capacity to understand the

narrated metaphor of parable and its didactic purpose. The children here seem to have acquired intuitively what Piaget (and Goldman following him) suggests should come much later in their cognitive development.

Is there any awareness of reading historically?

Though the children located the events surrounding the telling of the parables in the past and saw the parables themselves as narratives from the past, they did not recognize any historical limitations to reaching their interpretations. They were not hampered by any of the trained readers' uncertainties surrounding sources or date and place of the individual pericopes or the Gospel of Matthew as a whole.

Nor were the children concerned with the social or religious situation in which Matthew lived. They took no account of the listeners or readers of Matthew's time and their theological concerns.

Clearly the historical aspects of interpretation do not appear to be of any great significance for the children. We should not necessarily conclude this to be a negative finding. The parables *by themselves* do not raise historical expectations and their central truths are not lessened by reading without historical awareness. This does not mean to gainsay the importance of developing in ordinary child readers an awareness of the temporal or socio - cultural distance between them and the texts of the Bible if they are to make any serious interpretations.

Is the text read canonically?

Just as the children do not give history a high priority in their readings, so also is there no evidence of any conscious reflection on the canonicity of the parables or of any understanding of canon. It should be recalled here that I made reading canonically difficult, if not impossible, for the children even if they had wanted to by removing the seven parables from their canonical context!

Though the children do not make any explicit claims to be reading canonically, they do seem to imply that the pericopes they read have an authoritative status. The indirect evidence for this is the occasional reference to 'God's word' (as in I.208, I.750 and I.758) which suggests divine revelation and an acknowledgement of the parables as authoritative. This understanding of the children's general position with regard to the parables as inspired Scripture is given additional support by the responses to Question 4 on the LPQ (see p. 39).

Do the children read existentially and apply the texts to today?

These two closely related questions are to be considered together.

Although the children were not asked whether the parables 'say anything to us today' or what they 'learned from this study' (as in the Draper & West study, 1989:49), they did so spontaneously in a number of places in their discussions. At these points the children express not only what they conceive as the meaning of the parable but also attempt to translate their discoveries into the 'interpretative horizon' of their own lives and time as children.

This dimension to the meaning of the parables may be illustrated by the use of 'us' in Group S's discussion of the parable of the Sower (I. 236) and of the

parable of the Weeds (l. 493). In the first instance, mentioned earlier (p.52), the identification of the seed scattered by the sower as 'us' acknowledges that this detail has an existential application. The second use of 'us' indicates a reformulation of the resemblance between the weeds and the wheat into the children's own context (p.60).

A further translation of the parables into existential decisions may be seen in the children's attempts at formulating the general sense of a parable:

- 'Jesus wanted to say we should be good inside' (l. 8, the parable of the Sower);
- 'never expect what you think it is going to be like' (l. 310, the parable of the Weeds);
- 'some people are good at some things and some people aren't' (l. 347, the parable of the Mustard Seed).

There is a clearly implied 'so' in such summaries pointing to an application of the truths (as the children see them) that the parables teach.

In addition, the children relate the claims Jesus' teaching in the parables make on themselves through the examples they draw from their social reality to illustrate their religious understanding of what they read. They refer in various places to a birthday party (ll. 319-322), a rock star (ll. 358-359), lunch, probably a packed school lunch (l. 431), and to stealing, being horrible, and bullying (ll. 646-647).

Do the readings take context into account?

The context referred to in this question is not the original context now lost in which Jesus told the parables, nor Matthew's reconstructed context for the seven parables, nor the context of the individual Gospel of Matthew but the children's present South African context. Such a contextual reading would

involve a critical analysis in which the children take heed of both their secular and ecclesiastical context (Draper and West 1989:43). This context is given in broad terms earlier (see pp. 23 & 24 and pp. 37 & 38) in the analysis of the LPQ. With this perspective in mind the answer which the discussion data yields to whether the children take into account or allow context to shape their 'meaning' is no.

When this outcome is viewed in the spirit of the 'new hermeneutic' there appears a need (for these children at least) to be helped to recognize their context and to make this 'context as interpreter[s] visible' (McKim 1986: 8).

Is there any familiarity with reading corporately?

The current constructivist learning environment in education places a high priority on learners managing their own learning and making their own meaning. Within this environment a critical component of instructional design is co-operative learning and collaborative small-group work. It should be recalled here also that just over a third of the subjects were also involved in a Bible study group (see Table 3) where they would have experienced reading co-operatively. The positive effects of this experience showed clearly in the group discussions.

So the learners who were the subjects in this research project were clearly used to self-directed group learning activities on a regular basis. The groundwork for corporate activity focused on an authentic task in which meaning is negotiated was well laid for the researcher.

Some of this familiarity with reading corporately was evident from the researcher's observations and in the discussion transcripts. Firstly, leadership was shared more or less evenly and everyone in the groups was involved and

made a contribution but participation was not always equal. In Group J, for example, a particularly assertive learner, somewhat lacking in small-group social skills, tried to force a silent and reluctant group member to participate in the discussion of the parable of the Weeds (ll. 289-290). Secondly, learners used one another as resources and helped one another by asking for and giving help as in Group L (ll. 79-83) when a non-English-speaking learner recognizes the need for help and asks for the meaning of 'produced'. Thirdly, the learners showed a remarkable group concentration on the task in hand. However, at least one learner did not see the discussions of the parables as regular academic work and was concerned about the class work he was missing and believed he would have to make up (ll. 159-162)!

Is there evidence of dualism in the readings?

The term dualism is understood in a number of ways by scholars but it is used here in the sense of the ancient idea of two conflicting spiritual powers of good and evil ruling over the universe since its inception. Such cosmic dualism is not apparent in the data from the children's discussions.

While God and his angels and the Devil and his intermediary beings do appear in the children's interpretations of some of the parables, the roles of God and the Devil are not extensively evolved. What the data do show is that the children assume God and the Devil to exist and that they take these spiritual beings' activities for granted (as illustrated by ll. 205;242; 820), but there is no evidence in these data of any acquaintance with the idea of a cosmic dualism.

The sense of dualism which the children do seem to derive from the parables is ethical. God and the Devil appear as personifications of good and evil respectively in competition for the 'belief' (e.g. ll. 204 & 238) of humans. And though the Devil functions in this view as a deceiver of humans and the one

who brings their separation from God (e.g. l. 491), this allegiance and separation can only be accomplished through the choices humans make.

From this exploration of some of the children's specific but related hermeneutical concerns we have looked beyond their pre-critical readings of the seven parables to get some sense of how these readings came about. In summary, what emerges is that the children have a hermeneutical starting-point from which they could be guided by trained readers to reflect on how they come to understand text. Such facilitation could contribute to the fulfilment of a suggested critical outcome for Religious Education in South Africa to 'develop skills in relation to sacred writings' (Department of Education 1999: 50).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Despite a number of limitations which we shall consider below, the study reported here can be considered a success in that the two research questions have been answered. The pragmatic analysis of 'what reader effects become operative' (Thisleton 1992: 7) in interpretation in the children's context has, I think, identified and characterized the sense the children have made of the seven parables and their hermeneutic skills. Two tentative but I believe credible conclusions can be made.

First, when ordinary child readers are allowed to follow a pattern of discussion natural to them they show that they possess considerable interpretative resources. Children as young as ten years of age can readily conceptualize reading a parable as a search for meaning. They can also offer their insights

and share them with one another to discover an agreed and intelligible, if not the most sophisticated possible, meaning of a biblical parable. At first sight the children's interpretative approach is allegorical but their allegorizing does not lose sight of tying together the elements into a central theme. They can also bring into their exposition their own experiences and consider the contemporary relevance of the text to their self-understanding and their identity as children. Where the children mainly differ from the trained reader is in their lack of attention to determining reasons for or against their particular understanding of the text.

Second, the findings of this study indicate some initial evidence that children have available to them intuitive hermeneutical skills which they are well able to use. So the ordinary child reader seems to operate, as every interpreter, from a hermeneutic foundation. What the children fail to do here is to reflect on the contribution to their understanding of biblical text of the identified configuration of preferred hermeneutical strategies or intuitions.

Several limitations to these conclusions and to the study as a whole should be noted.

The first limitation is a difficulty found in all inter-cultural research. The discussions in English which determined the exclusion criterion in the sampling sidelined some children whose voices should be heard. In addition, the relatively small sample size drawn from a single school in a geographically limited area may not be representative of the general population of Grade 5 learners. Therefore, generalizations to other schools and regions outside may not be warranted.

A further limitation is in the single question (see p.30) I put to the children in my instructions in the entry process to the discussions. The question was intended to be open ended but, as I have already suggested, it may have

stimulated and shaped the particular approach to interpretation and the mode of hermeneutic activity the children followed.

A third limitation, and what must appear to a biblical scholar to be a substantial weakness in this study, is the isolation of the parabolic units from the immediate and broader contexts of Matthew's major themes. I have already pointed out my reasons for the decision to use the parables as seven discreet units and can only add that the children's readings should be seen as preliminary and unresolved. It is acknowledged that the readings would have been conditioned by the background and context of the parables had it been made available though it would not necessarily have been determined by these factors.

Also, the audio-recording of the discussion Episodes does not provide the whole range of dimensions of the children's discourse. For instance, it erases non - verbal data as it can only 'listen'. These limitations are even more evident in the transcripts. A video-recording , if this facility had been available to the researcher and if the camera had been pointed in the right direction, could have given access to the extra linguistic features of the discussions and thus contributed refinements to the production of the transcripts.

Finally, and a critical issue in any research, especially research using data from discussion groups is a measure of validity. Several 'triangulation' validity measures for qualitative research were considered such as the use of two or more independent analyses of the transcripts or the use of multiple data sources. However, such options could not be addressed with the limited time and resources available to the researcher. The validity of my analysis and interpretation of the data is therefore subject to question.

These limitations and the difficulties experienced in the study should not encourage a sense of disappointment with the data the children's discussions provide. They should be seen rather as a positive finding of the complexity of awakening children's understanding of biblical text.

With these limitations in mind, let me turn to some modest speculations on the implications this project might have for children's study of the Bible as a cultural and religious book of the Christian tradition or as sacred Scripture in the church. Two overlapping roles seem to be suggesting themselves in this study which should be part of the religious educator's activities in facilitating the emergence of the religious perspective of the outcomes proposed in the national curriculum (cf. Department of Education 1999: 49-51).

In line with present curriculating, religious educators in both school and church need to move away from the transmission to children of ready made or edited interpretations of sacred text to accessing first the prior knowledge, background experience and existing interpretations and skills of children. Once children have been given the opportunity to speak for themselves and attempted to come as clearly as possible to their own understanding of sacred text, the trained reader is then in a better position to know how to read 'with' them. The task of the religious educator who usually has to assume the role of trained reader is to deepen and enrich the children's understandings and skills. As a conversation partner the religious educator can thus provide critical questions and historical and cultural background to help the children into a new plane curve of the spiral of interpretation to more comprehensive 'pre-understandings' of sacred text. And all these kinds and levels of understanding need to be acknowledged as important.

This study also suggests that religious educators need to take cognizance of the hermeneutic skills children already possess and to provide opportunities for them to 'understand' better the process of understanding a written text. This

possibility is encouraged by experiences with teaching practices in the field of reading comprehension instruction which emphasize reading as a thinking process. Here the educator's role is to increase young readers' control of their constructive and strategic behaviours with real literature and content material. Child readers of sacred texts in religious education could benefit from such strategic reading instruction.

It remains now to examine some possible lines of future research. Three broad types of enquiry are currently of interest to me. First, further research to refine the findings of this small sample study with a broader age range and a larger number of children to confirm and/or correct the preliminary findings reported here. Another area of interest is a longitudinal study of children younger and older that might give some measure of subsequent development of both interpretative and hermeneutical skills over a period of time. And I am also interested in a quantitative study of the effects on children's Bible skills of direct instruction in strategic reading behaviours. I believe that answers to such questions could have positive effects on the religious education of children who are a valued part of 'God's hermeneutical community' (McKim 1986: 308).

Appendix 1

LEARNER PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____ Grade _____

Date of birth _____ Boy/Girl _____

Home language _____

Church denomination _____

1. Do you belong to a Bible Study Group _____

Circle ONE answer to the following questions.

2. How often do you go to Church or Sunday School?

Nearly every week.	At least once a month.	Sometimes.	Once or twice a year.	Never.
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3. How often do you read the Bible?

Nearly every week.	At least once a month.	Sometimes.	Once or twice a year.	Never.
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4. Do you think the stories in the Bible really happened?

Yes, all of it happened.	Most of it really happened.	Some of it really happened.	Very little of it really happened.	No, none of it really happened.
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5. What is a parable? (Use the space below for your answer.)

_____ (Turn over if you need more space)

Thank you! You can stop here.

CA _____ RA _____

Appendix 2

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TRANSCRIPTS

The transcripts of the discussions of each of the three groups J, L and S are arranged according to the Episodes 1, 2 and 3 (see p. 27).

EPISODE 1 *The Sower*

GROUP J

- Um - I think Jesus wanted to say that we should be good inside and never - um - be horrible or something.
- Okay (*Silence*).
- 10 • I think he was kind of saying that we should be nice to people...that churches and...
- I think *that* because it says some seed fell on good soil and plants produced corn, some produced 100 grains and others 60 and others 30.
- Um - I think it means - um - if you are good you can turn - I mean, if you are bad, you can turn into good.
- I think that - um - if you've been born in a family of goodness and grace - if you don't smoke and take drugs and don't drink so much, then you'll most probably grow up to be a good person. Some others grew up and - um- fields and bushes and - um - grew up and choked everything around them that lived and others fell on the hard - the harder soil - and the sun came out. And it's just like Jesus, or God - and
- 20 like Adam and Eve - who was obeyed and they did that.
- M-hm.
- I think the seeds were just lucky.
- Go on! (*addressing a silent member of the group*). (Long silence.)
- You know - um - that Bible story that Mrs X was saying in assembly with the man Jacob who...with the children and I think that some of his sons...
- Could be. (Silence and giggling).
- We've finished Mr L (*addressed to researcher*).
- (3 minutes 37 seconds)

GROUP L

- 30 • (*Re -reading of text one verse per child. Initiated by the children themselves*).
- What is the saying listen to him with your ears?
- Um - sowing. What does it mean?
- Spread it?
- Listen if you have ears.
- Listen!
- You must *listen*...
- Listen what you are told. .
- Listen very carefully.

- Listen when you are talked to.
- 40 • Ja.
- The man who spreads the thing wasn't told anything.
- Listen *then* if you have ears.
- Listen *then* if you have ears, if you *want to* listen.
- You must listen if you have got ears but if you don't have ears you can't listen (*Giggles*).
- What is corn?
- It's like mealie - sweetcorn.
- (*Mumble*) Okay.
- What's sprouted?
- 50 • Growth.
- Growth?
- Ja, it's another word for growth.
- Ah, it just come up.
- I know nothing about this.
- I think listen then if you have ears..be careful when you plant the seed.
- You plant the seeds anyway...the birds come and eat it (*General agreement*).
- I dunno...
- You have to plant a seed...(*Interjection: That's true.*)...the seed where it's suitable for it.
- 60 • Yep.
- You plant it carefully.
- Nothing else?
- Ja.
- But what does this story mean?
- It means...
- Again, why did Jesus leave the house? I don't understand.
- Ah.
- To go home.
- Ja.
- 70 • Oh.
- Carry on with the...what...you-call-it.
- What everyone's calling the parable is a story.
- What does the story mean?
- The story means we can hold on to your monkey (*sic*)...I mean, your things.
- What things?
- Your corn.
- Your seeds.
- Yes, your seeds. (*Silence*).
- What does 'produced' mean?
- 80 • Produced like...like...they produce Coca-cola.
- They make.
- Ja, they make something.
- Yeah, around about that. (*Children refer to text. Mumbled reading*).
- Listen *then*.
- Seems to be angry.

- Why is it listen *then*? Why can't it just be *listen*?
- Listen then, do your...
- Listen very carefully.
- Cos the story has a meaning.
- 90 • Cos our teacher doesn't say 'listen *then*'... all she says is 'listen'.
- A couple of seeds can go a long way. Okay?
- That story *means* that be careful where you plant your things. That's all.
- Yes.
- A couple of seeds go a long way.
- They went to...where he was walking across a field (*Interjection*)...they went to rocky ground, they went to thorn bushes and then plants in good soil...
- ...and good soil.
- They planted about. You're quite right (*Name*).
- What it's really telling us...
- 100 • It's telling us that a couple of seeds can go a *very long* way.
- Mmmm. (*Silence... mentions a child's name...silence*).
- This whole story is just about telling us that a capital (*sic*)...a couple of seeds can go a very long way.
- Mmmh.
- I think it's more than that, guys.
- Really?
- Yeah.
- Well, what kind of meaning?
- I think there's another meaning.
- 110 • U-uh.
- Listen! (*Silence*).
- Okay, Jesus left the house to...okay, he left the house to go...
- ...to tell the story...
- ...to tell the story of...yes, but then he's supposed to go to the boat, he's supposed to go and tell the story, but then he went to the boat...he sat in it.
- No, he went and told the story in the boat because there were so many people.
- Ja.
- In the boat? Why the boat?
- There's room in the boat.
- 120 • Because there were so many people that he didn't have any place to...
- (*Quiet interjection*)...sit.
- He must have sat there and others blocking their ears, shouting his loudest...then like...can't hear you!
- Okay. (*Silence*).
- Once there was a man who went to sow corn...okay...why corn? Why do we call him *the man*?
- ...the man.
- I know whose the man...he scattered seed in the fields, some of it fell along the path and birds came and ate it all up.
- 130 • Some of it, not all of it.
- If it was all of it, how could it strangle the other plants?
- Mmmm (*Silence*).

- ...that's the fifteenth letter in the alphabet! (*Silence*).
- Does anyone else have any meaning to the story?
- Yesss.
- What then?
- It says here that Jesus left the *house* and went to the lake and sat on the boat.
- Says *the sea* actually, I think.
- Yeah, it says lake.
- 140 • Lake?
- Yes, yes...to, to teach children and then he went to one side...then he was walking and he dropped some seed.
- No. He was actually *planting* it.
- No he wasn't!
- He *was* planting it!
- Oh...oh well, ja , planting...and that's why some fell on the rocks.
- Yes, and he planted it in the wrong place (*Several interjections of agreement*),.
- One at a time.
- Why did he plant it in the *rich* soil, *some* of it fell on rocky ground, and *some* of it
- 150 • fell among bushes...
- ...thorn bushes...
- ...he didn't *plant* it in the thorn bushes.
- And then when it grew it...it strangled the...
- Why did he have thorn bushes?
- Bushes...the story means...
- We've got one of it...there *is* another meaning.
- We've got to work out the other meaning.
- Ja, well let's try to find out.
- Now we're actually missing a lot of classwork.
- 160 • Anyway, that's cool.
- We're going to have to catch it up.
- But not today. (*In a sing-song voice*).
- Okay...um...what does it mean?
- It means that...that...the man...like everyone else calls it (*sic* him?)...he went outside and sat on the boat and taught the children...(*No interjected*)...he did!
- He taught the crowd. It doesn't say *children* or people...the crowd.
- So loud that he actually got into a boat and sat in it.
- He sat, he didn't speak?
- There were so many people around him...he went and sat on the boat...and...
- 170 • ...and he didn't speak! (*Giggles*).
- (*Some unintelligible interjections*).
- It didn't tell us, that's why.
- No, it said that he...
- No, but then...no, but then...the man, then Jesus told...
- If you've got one...like one side, and then you want to add something on it's another.
- Then Jesus *said*...
- Okay.

- 180 • But there's two different meanings in the story. First Jesus and then 'once there was a man who'...
- No, Jesus is telling the story.
- Iknewww, I knewww!
- But look, this is not the beginning of the story.
- No, this is just the story...is from the Bible.
- Yes.
- Yes, see?
- And, this story Jesus told the *other* people about *that* man.
- Yes, I know and then...and then told...then Jesus told the crude (*sic* crew?) about 'once there was a man' blah, blah, blah.
- 190 • So there must be a meaning to...because if Jesus told it...that meant the meaning...he told them the meaning.
- He probably went every day and told the people. He wouldn't tell the story about Goldilocks and the three bears for nothing...the story *means* something and so he's telling it.
- Why? But what is the meaning. (*No further discussion*)
- (13 minutes 34 seconds)

GROUP S

- (*Some initial apprehension about the tape recorder*).
- I think it (*referring to the Seed*) means about people.
- 200 • Some fell on the path and the birds came and ate it up.
- They didn't believe in God.
- I think like... some fell on the rocky ground and sprouted...they do believe in God for a little while and then they didn't believe and then the sun came...
- And then some fell among bushes...some of them believed in God and they...
- ...then Satan came along.
- They believe in God and the seed fell on good ground and grew...they believed in God.
- Listen then if you have ears...if you listen to God's word, listen to God's word.
- What does (*Brief intercom interruption*)...
- 210 • The 100 grains are the good ones and then the 60, the ones that...
- ...that were okay but still...
- ...the ones that believed.
- Okay.
- And? (*Laughter*) that's all!
- Mmm.
- Because when the sun comes up it burnt the young...because...well it burnt young plants because the roots had not grown deep enough.
- Ja, they didn't believe things.
- They were getting into it but they just...
- 220 • ...they just left it.
- They left it and the roots dies (*Laughter*).
- The man that scattered the stuff was like Jesus (*General agreement*).

- Who were the birds?
- The birds were Satan...Satan's like people...angels...
- Ja...a very cruel man.
- We call them devils (*Again, general agreement*).
- (*Mumbled readings from the text followed by indistinct question about 'ears'*).
- That means that listen...if you have ears you must listen to God...if you have them.
- And then love him.
- 230 • Ja , love him. (*Silence while referring to the passage again*).
- What's this...the path?
- The people that tread on the paths.
- I think that's all we need to do.
- Let's go through it again, okay?
- Let's start at the beginning.
- Seeds are Jesus, the seeds are us.
- Yes, yes. Some of it fell along the path.
- People just...they didn't even *start* believing in God...they just all left him.
- Ja.
- 240 • ...or is it that they went on the wrong path?
- They followed the path.
- Then Satan came along...took...and took over them...and then...
- Some on rocky ground...what's rocky ground?
- It was like (*indistinct*).
- Satan probably took one of the...and then Satan...(*indistinct*)...what people are like.
- They sprouted but the soil wasn't deep means their love wasn't deep.
- Ja , they didn't love God that much.
- They *loved* him, but they didn't... love...
- 250 • They believed in him but they didn't love.
- Ja , and they got tired and they forgot about him.
- And the bushes...the bushes...they believed in it but had some doubts about it...and some...some...
- ...they like grew.
- Those among the bushes...they like believed and stuff like that and everything but when it came to like...suffering...
- Yes.
- And when the seed that fell on good soil...they grew...they *believed* properly, they loved him.
- 260 • It's sort of like love is a problem.
-
- I don't think we need to go through it again.
- We are finished.
- We're getting there...(*Some quiet reading of text*).
- The ones that are choked are the 60 and then the 30 are the...
- ...no, no...the 30 are the...
- ...the 30 are the ones that grew.
- *And* the 60 *and* the 100!

- 270 • The 30 were the ones who were getting there...they were nearly there...and the hundreds...they were *there*. (*Some indistinct comment*).
- Okay, we're finished now. (*Laughter*). (7 minutes 8 seconds).

EPISODE 2 *The Weeds, the Mustard Seed and the Yeast*

GROUP J

- 'The Kingdom of Heaven is like this...' Well, Jesus is telling us what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. 'A man sowed good seed in his field'...man and heaven...
- (*Reads v 25*).
- What do you think it means?
- I think they came and stole the weeds.
- 280 • What is the meaning of it? Why did an enemy just come and put weeds in? Didn't he like the man? Did he hate the man? Did he want the man to eat it up?
- I think he didn't want that man to have the weeds, I mean, the seeds.
- Ja. He was an evil man and...um...someone evil.
- You (*Names a child in the group*). You must read about (*verse*) 26...that parable and tell us what it means.
- (*Reads verse 26*).
- What do you think it means?
- The weeds and seeds had grown and the ears were starting to form.
- What does it mean?
- 290 • Ja.
- Well...um...(*Reads verse 27*). He was saying that *those* seeds were good, they weren't weed seeds, they weren't bad seeds. So, why is weeds growing in the field?
- (*Reads verse 27*). Well, I think the servants asked to pull the weeds out.
- Yes, explain it.
- So, I think he wants to take the weeds when he was pulling them out... when he's pulling them out of the garden.
- Field!
- Field.
- (*Reads verse 29*).
- 300 • What do you think it *means*? (*Exasperated.*) Just say what it means. You're always saying Uh? Uh? (*Silence*).
- Well...I think he wants to save his wheat cos they might pull out some of it.
- Yes, it's that (*Name*)! (*Indicates next child to read*).
- (*Reads verse 30*). So, now he's saying 'let the wheat and the weeds grow together'. So he's saying, *leave* it, let it grow together...until the time that the people have come and, like, take the corn off, or whatever it is, and they'd pull out the weeds, put them in bundles and burn them...and gather the wheat and put them in the barn.
- Finished.
- Now we've got to explain what the story's about.
- 310 • I think the story is about never expect what you think it's going to be like.

- I think this story..um..means...um...means that...um,um (*Giggling*)...you must never take things back that are not yours.
- It doesn't say... where's it say you mustn't ever take anything that isn't yours.
- Look, Jesus tells a parable...another parable (*Reads verse 24*)...
- ...yeah, but what is the enemy taking away from the man?
- ...(*Continues reading verse 25*).
- That's *not* what it *means*!
- No, it's his seed but he's going to come and put it in his place.
- 320 • So, what the story is like...it's going to be your birthday party and you think the whole class is coming to your birthday, but not the whole class rocks up. Say only four people rock up. So it like says, don't expect what you think is going to happen...unless it happens, okay? (*Addressing another group member by name*) what do you think it means?
- I think you must try to think to say your things, not just do anything.
- If you have like what it says...if you plant in your garden and weeds come, you must try to think before you just pull out the weeds.
- That's a good answer.
- (*Turning to researcher*) Okay, we've finished.
- (6 minutes 15 seconds)

- 330 (Short break to hand out next two parables before continuing).

- (*Child reads verse 31*).
- Okay, what about it? (*Giggling*).
- Okay, Jesus told another parable, okay?
- I think it means, it means...um...I think it means we, like, when you...the Kingdom of Heaven is like this...a man takes a seed...a man is taking a seed now, a mustard seed. He takes a *mustard* seed and sows it in his field...otherways, planting it in his field. So he's planting it. See, he sows it in his field.
- (*Reads verse 32*) So...? The seed is the *smallest* and it then grew to be the biggest of all the plants...it became a tree so that birds could come and make their nests in the branches...otherways, doesn't matter how small or how big you are...
- 340 • ...you produce some good.
- No...you still believe in yourself or something.
- Like you say that 'I wanna be big, I wanna be big'.
- Say...you want to be big like (*names a child*) because she can do hockey, she can do sport. Jesus is saying : '...now (*names another child*) is feeling out because he can't do it...' So it doesn't matter what you are, you aren't good at everything...you are good at some things (*Corrects herself*) ... some people are good at some things and some people aren't.
- It makes no sense!
- 350 • It makes some sense!
- (*Starts to read verse 33*).
- A-uh! What do you think it means?
- (*Starts verse 33 again in a whisper*).
- No. You still have to tell us what do you think it's about.

- Well, I think it doesn't matter how small you are you can still grow to be bigger. (*Whisper*).
- (*Defensively*) I didn't say anything!
- Oh well...I think the story means that if you want to be like...ah...you know, a rock star...Janet Jackson, you can still grow...maybe like do the things she does...um?...
- 360 • Understand?...
- Okay, let's go on to the next one.
- ... (*continuing*) you can do it too.
- (*Reads verse 33*).
- What do you think it means (*Names a child*)? You *have* to say *something*!
- I don't have to!
- (*Taking charge*) Okay...the Kingdom of Heaven is like this...so God is saying the Kingdom of Heaven is like *this*...a woman takes...you see, it's simple. All you have to do...like a woman takes some yeast, some food, and mixes it with 40 litres of flour until the whole batch of dough...
- 370 • ...(*whispers*) rises.
- (*To the child named above in line 360*) Now *explain* it! *Explain* it! *Explain*! What do you think that woman is doing, imagine in your head...close your eyes...now imagine what's in your head, what that woman is doing. *Explain* it!
- Okay, I think...um...
- (*Exasperated*) Oh!
- ...that like when we really want...um...
- I know where this story comes from! It comes from what's - its - name...that Easter thing...when Jesus was on the cross...he rised...
- (*Chorus*) No!
- 380 • Oh ja. What do you think it means?
- Well, it means that...um...Jesus died on the cross for us.
- No...Jesus has more power than us...dying he rose again...from the dead.
- It means God is a very loving person...well, he still *is* a loving person...um...Jesus...and he saved us, which is nice.
- We want to be loving as well.
- (*To researcher*) We've finished, sir. (6 minutes 54 seconds)

GROUP L

- (*Round robin reading of the Parable of the Weeds*).
- Why did Jesus tell the story then?
- 390 • I think he didn't like them (*Referent unclear*).
- It's always got a meaning.
- Probably just...maybe he told them that...um...ah, you should think before you do something. You might make a mistake.
- Or, think twice.
- Ja.
- Or like...let's say (*names a child*) you've got something I don't have, you must ask.

- Like, something goes wrong, all the juice leaks. Before cleaning up think what you're going to do.
- (*Some short unclear exclamations*).
- 400 • How did they know that a man came in the night and did this?
- They've got special video cameras!
- Most probably they worked that night.
- No...parables...
- Maybe one of the servants saw them.
- Ja. Probably saw foot traces and...
- No, but they noticed...um...it says...uh...
- Maybe they saw weeds growing.
- (*Several voices*) One at a time!
- (*Some indistinguishable comments*).
- 410 • Maybe (*name*) may be good at running, maybe I might be...maybe...um...good at something else. Everybody's got something of their own they're good at.
- (*Silent reading of text*).
- So it means: think twice before you do something.
- I'll look it up and tell you tomorrow.
- Don't open a box upside down.
- Or a packet of chips. (6 minutes 42 seconds).

(*Short break to hand out next two parables before continuing*).

- (*Round robin reading of the Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Yeast*).
- The first one...the first one means that...
- 420 • What is the Kingdom of Heaven is like is this.
- Look, the first one says...
- Our world is supposed to be like this...it is supposed to be like *this*.
- No, guys, look at the first one, look...Jesus told..a man...
- (*Reads*)...it says the smallest seed that when it grows it is the biggest of all plants.
- It's telling you not to be greedy.
- Ja.
- And although something starts very, very small...
- ...but when it's older it might just be big.
- It's share, that if you plant one then it grows up and then the birdies and then the squirrels and blah, blah, blah can come then they eat it.
- 430 • It's like even...if like...if you seem maybe you've got lunch and somebody hasn't got lunch then you must share with them because you've got it.
- You don't have to be greedy.
- Yes...(*sings*) greeedy.
- Okay, the first one tells you not to be greedy, now the second one...(*Reads silently*).
- She wants to make a huge cake...very fat.
- Why does she wait?
- Why does she put 40 litres?
- That's what I want to know.
- 440 • To share it, of course.
- No, man, she wants it to rise.

- So it's like...keeps on mixing...then it goes wheee!
- Why so much flour?
- So she can share
- Ja, (*Unclear comment*).
- I think it's not to be greedy as well.
- No, no, no! (*Unclear comment about muffins*).
- He's (*the child in the previous line*) talking about muffins which is not the thing.
- No,man,no...so if you have a muffin, you break it in half or quarters or halves or
- 450 blah, blah, blah and you share it.
- You share, and you share and then at the end *you* don't have anything to eat.
- No, obviously you keep some for yourself.
- No, the first time you cut one for yourself.
- Ja, one for me...
- The parable of the mustard seed means you share.
- No.
- The top one (*referring to the Mustard Seed*) is share, second one is...
- The parable of the Yeast means don't be greedy.
- But some people...you borrow them something...and after the end they say, 'I
- 460 didn't have to...I didn't need it anyway.' They don't appreciate you. (6 minutes 5 seconds).

GROUP S

- Okay. (*All study text silently*).
- Um...the enemy is Satan.
- Obviously the man who sowed the seeds is Jesus.
- Was God.
- Ja, God.
- And he put like weeds...like people in the wheat...
- The weeds mean the evil things.
- 470 • The weeds were obviously people who believed in the devil and they wanted everyone else to believe in the devil.
- Ja, the wheat...
- And the wheat is the people who believe in God.
- And then when they started like...um...when they...when the plants grew into corn and stuff like that...yes, corn...and they had to do it by night and they never saw them.
- Ja, cos like Satan's dark and God's light.
- Eeee! (*Laughter*).
- And the harvesters was probably the angels.
- 480 • Ja...and here (refers to text) where they say...um...until the harvest is probably the end of the world.

- Ja...and here (*refers to text*)... you see at the top ‘and the wheat grew and ears of corn began to form’.
- The ears of corn are like hearing God’s word.
- And the plants getting bigger and bigger...learning God’s word.
- And the whole field is probably the whole world.
- Ja, like they were...
- Um...and then the weeds showed up...then they were so happy they believed in God and they loved him and that...and then the weeds grew.
- 490 • (*Unintelligible interjection*).
- They were trying to take them away from like God and make them believe in Satan.
- Cos they were like...thought like these guys were stupid.
- Ja, because they looked like *us*.
- Yes, he still loves them...Jesus still loves them.
- Jesus is saying: ‘don’t take them away, let them grow...let them have a chance.’
- Yes.
- They might start believing.
- And they’d be around people who believe in God and they’ll begin to think differently.
- 500 • They see us... (*unintelligible comment*).
- Then it says... ‘and it was some enemy that did this’...that was Satan.
- And they said: ‘Don’t pull the weeds up and let the wheat and the weeds both grow’...both together till harvest because they have to wait until the end of the world and then Jesus will come and take...
- ...them into the barn and into his house...heart.
- The barn is in heaven.
- Let the wheat grow...let them grow together and until Jesus comes.
- Give them a chance.
- And then Jesus will take the good people, the wheat...the devil will take the weeds to hell...
- 510 • To separate them...
- ...and like maybe...you know they say...then I will tell the harvest workers to pull up the wheat first.
- Yes...um...(*refers to text*) that’s to separate them.
- Pull...pull them out first...
- ...so they’re separated then.
- Ja, but why would he want to pull the weeds out first...at the same time...because maybe they would pull the wheat and the weeds at the same time.
- If he took the wheat out first, then maybe more wheat will grow and then...yes...the wheat will still be here. So, you took the weeds out first then they won’t grow anymore and they can’t kill the other plants...they can’t take over us.
- 520 • Because, if you take out like the wheat...
- ...and *then*, and *then* tie them in bundles and burn them...burn them...
- ...so that you just get rid of them out of our lives.
- And take the evil people, tie them , bundle them...and like throw them in hell (*Laughter*).
- And then the wheat is in the barn...is like, in heaven and in God’s heart and stuff.
- Okay, let’s do it again.

- Right, let's just check it that there's anything we missed out...(*Read silently*)...and he came at night and they were asleep and no one would see them...we said that.
- 530 • (*Mumbled reading*).
- Then when the plants *grew*...just as they were like maybe enjoying their life.
- Yes, and then happy and everything and then...
- ...ugly people came.
- And the weeds came and destroyed their lives.
- Ja, basically they had to let them get bigger so that they could see the difference between the two.
- Ja.
- Yes.
- 540 • Okay...(to the researcher) we've finished. (6 minutes 12 seconds).
- (*Short break to hand out next two parables before continuing*).
-
- This (*referring to the Parable of the Mustard Seed*) is about...is God...something to do with heaven, spiritual...
- ...and it must get...
- Why must it be mustard?
- Because it's the smallest and then it grows.
- Why mustard seed?
- Let's make it...it's like a baby and it's small and it's going to learn and get stronger.
- 550 • Ja, but *why* is it a mustard seed?
- Because it's the smallest seed in the world (*Laughs*). If you plant a mustard seed it's a mustard seed, okay?
- Must be. The mustard seed is different from all the other children...the other seeds, and it's smaller than all the others and people obviously don't think of it...it's like just not worth it.
- Ja...he planted it and he grows.
- And they, like, all tease him and he'll be like the smallest.
- And as he learns about God and he grows more and more and then he begins to love God more and more.
- 560 • And then the other seeds suffer.
- Ja, because they don't believe in God, they believe more in Satan and stuff.
- They believe a bit in God.
- Yes.
- and then...and then they still tease the small mustard seed but the mustard seed learns more and more with God's love.
- And he...he becomes the biggest.
- And he has faith in God.
- Yes, he has faith in God and he becomes the biggest.
- Well, what's this? The birds in his branches.
- 570 • Well, other people want to learn about God.
- Ja.
- Yes...it's like priests or prophets...
- ...or the children want to learn. The people want to learn about God.
- Like, the people who were around him, they see he's become...

- ...this big tree and they're all these puny little things.
- Okay, the next one, the parable of the Yeast. (*They read silently*).
- Well, Jesus is in all these things trying to tell them what heaven is like.
- You know yeast starts off very tiny and then grows as if...they're learning. It feels like the wheat.
- 580 • And...and...the woman's obviously an angel.
- Ja, and as she mixes they grow...um...more faithful to God.
- Then the 40 litres must be all the people and stuff.
- Forty people. Maybe like heaven is growing bigger.
- Yes, because many more people that believe in God...like the dough, for instance, will rise.
- It's...are like humans.
- So, like the woman...the woman is like God's angel and stuff and she takes the yeast that is growing and mixes it with 40 litres of flour which must be like all the people...like all those little grains of flour must be tons of people altogether, and the
- 590 • more people she puts in the more it rises.
- And maybe the yeast is to make them grow strong.
- Maybe...maybe the angel is teaching them about God and more of them are, like, learning and then they rise...
- And heaven grows big.
- And...um...and the yeast could be like...as I said...
- ...like God.
- No, like angels (*sings la-la-la*).
- Everything's an angel!
- The goodness, goodness...to teach them...
- 600 • Ja.
- And teach them the Bible and stuff.
- Okay.
- And then they grow...because that's what yeast *does*...it makes it *rise*.
- Okay, finished.
- Yep. (3 minutes 37 seconds)

EPISODE 3 *The Treasure, the Pearl and the Net*

GROUP J

- 610 • (*Child reads verse*)
- So, the Kingdom of heaven is like this...he happens to find treasure in a field and he covers it up in the field again and he's so happy that he goes and sells everything that he has and then goes back and buys that field.
- So he's happy when he's done everything.
- Ja.1
- The hidden treasure...I think...I think...

- What do you think?
- It's telling us about Jesus (*Silence as she refers to text*)...um...
- 620 • Right, a man happens to find treasure hidden in a field like it's something so adorable that he can't take his eyes off from God, okay? And when he's found it he sells everything that he can and buys the field. I don't know why God says that.
- (*Child reads a verse*).
- When he finds it (*referring to the pearl*) and it's unusual...he goes and sells everything he has and buys that pearl.
- (*Child reads a verse*).
- So...um...God is trying to say...like say...the children were more pearls like grown-ups.
- You know what God is saying? He's saying the very same thing as the last one (*referring to the parable of the Treasure*)...the pearl is like precious...just like
- 630 • Jesus...you know like when Jesus when he has to die on the cross...he (*referring to the merchant*) sells everything and he tries to find Jesus.
- Perhaps (*name*) would like to sat something.
- (*No response. Short silence*)
- (*To researcher*) we've finished now. (3 minutes 40 seconds)

(*Short break to hand out next parable before continuing*).

- (*Child reads a verse*).
- Explain what it is saying.
- So the heaven is like this...just saying heaven is like this.
- (*Child reads a verse. Short silence*).
- 640 • So they sat down to divide the fish...the good ones go into the bucket ...the good ones are kept.
- You go (*name*). (*Child named reads a verse*).
- They...the good people will be gathered up by the angels of God...finally...the good people will go to heaven and the bad will go to hell.
- (*Child reads verse 15*).
- So what Jesus is saying over there is that the world will end...be good, don't steal, don't be horrible, don't, like, bully everyone because you might be like one of those people crying and grinding their teeth...so watch out!
- That's right.
- 650 • (*To researcher*) Finished. (2 minutes 13 seconds)

GROUP L

- (Round robin reading of the parable of the Treasure and the Pearl).
- Let's start with the parable of the hidden treasure.
- What does it mean that the Kingdom is like this?
- Probably that the Kingdom is like *that*.
- What does the story mean?
- But after he finds the treasure, why does he going and sell everything that he has?
- Because he wants to go and buy special tools.

- He wants to buy some new things.
- 660 • He went and sold all his house and that to buy the field because he didn't want anyone to know that the treasure was there...so that he could buy the field.
- He could buy the field and then take that treasure.
- But he could take the treasure without anyone knowing.
- That's why if somebody follows him and sees him with the treasure then they hunt for him.
- Well, then perhaps...he...he...runs away with the treasure and he sells the field.
- He sells the field...once he's got the treasure out, he goes and sells the field and then...
- He *buys* the field and he *sells* it again.
- 670 • Twice?
- Probably that is what he gets it for. He buys the field for the treasure...he moves to another place and comes and sells the field and *voila*, he's gone.
- Yes, he goes twice.
- He wants it for himself, not anyone else.
- Ja. He's jealous because he doesn't have it.
- No, no, no...he's greedy.
- He's greedy.
- He wants it because he can't have it...he buys a field and takes the treasure and then he takes the treasure and sells and then he goes back and buys the field and then...
- 680 • Oh, he wants the field to be his...
- It doesn't say he takes the treasure.
- I know. It doesn't say that. But it's *his* treasure.
- So he takes it anyway.
- Ja.
- It's his treasure because it's his field.
- Oh, I know! He buys the treasure...I mean, he finds the treasure because he thinks the treasure's in the field and he just buys the field.
- But he becomes poor one day.
- Ah, there we go.
- 690 • It would be much more better if she (*sic*) could give some money to the poor people...or children or whatever.
- People!
- (*Read the parable of the pearl again taking turns*).
- A man is looking for a fine pearl...pearls, by the way?
- Pearl.
- Okay, then he finds one that is unusually fine.
- He finds one at the shops. He sees one at the shops...so he sells...
- No! He *finds*
- one.
- 700 • Oh, he *finds* one...when he *finds* one.
- When he finds one he sells everything and goes and *buys* that pearl.
- So...it would be in the shops.
- But where does he get the money?
- He can't buy it if he finds it on the floor.
- Where does he get it? Where does he get the money to buy it?

- He *sells* everything that he has.
- Just to get that...
- ...that pearl.
- Then he sells the pearl for...
- 710 • ...big bucks.
- For a more amount of money so that he can be rich and buy himself a new house.
- But...please tell me, what does that mean?
- He's also greedy. Don't be greedy.
- Well...I mean...you find like...like two billion rand then you go and hand it out to everyone.
- (*Laughs*). I don't think so, my girl.
- No ways!
- I'll keep it.
- I'll keep it.
- 720 • Exactly!
- I'll keep it safe somewhere where no one...
- No, I would...I would keep it in the bank and take it when I'm big...when I'm older.
- He sells *everything* and he's gone back and bought the pearl with all that money he's sold everything with and then he takes the pearl and then he goes and sells the pearl for an even more amount of money...
- ...and buys himself a house...
- ...and then he buys himself anything he wants to buy himself.
- That's cool.
- Okay. (5 minutes 26 seconds)
- 730 • (*Short break to hand out the next parable before continuing.*)
- (*Round robin reading of the parable of the Net.*)
- But that is so bad...they catch some *fish* then...
- ...and throw away the worthless ones...the small ones that they can't use.
- Because?
- So the fish could grow up and be...(No! *interjected*)...bigger fish...bigger fish...they could live their lives but...
- (*Indistinct comment*).
- They are killing things, aren't they.
- No, for food of course.
- 740 • Would you go and catch a fish and then you take the fish and just throw it away for nothing?
- No, but if it's a poofy one.
- If it's so big (*Indicates*).
- Well then, wouldn't you think...(So big! *interjected*)...wouldn't you think rather to put it back in the water than leave it out and stink.
- That's what they do.
- They put it back in the water.
- Don't be evil.
- Oh God! (*With an exasperated sigh*).

- 750 • I think its message...keep God's word otherwise...thrown into the fearsome furnace where they will cry and cry.
- Yes, because at the end you'll be...
 - ...you'll be punished...
 - ...you'll be sorry for yourself and wish you didn't do it.
 - You've already done this deed...the damage's done...there's no way to change it, also...
 - So is this...is God's word...or you will be punished?
 - God's not telling us anything.
 - Then for once leave the fishes, they also want to live, you know, just like us.
- 760 • But we can't live without fish.
- You *can* live without fish.
 - You can live with vegetables.
 - Ja, but to *eat*.
 - We can't live without fish?
 - Some people they don't eat fish.
 - They don't. They eat juicy hamburgers. They just eat fish, fish, fish, fish...
 - They can go into a store that sells fishes.
 - Like...like haddock.
 - The store that gets it, they catch it first...they catch a lot of it.
- 770 • So *guys*, what we're trying to say is...
- I don't know.
 - Angazi. (*Short silence*).
 - Listen to his word otherwise you'll be punished.
 - At the end.
 - Yes...when you go up into...heaven.
 - The good people...
 - ...will bow...
 - ...will go, 'Ah!'
 - And the bad people will be punished a lot.
- 780 • Ja, the people who don't listen to him will be punished.
- Yes, there.
 - Finished? Okay. (4 minutes 12 seconds)

GROUP S

- (*Child reads the parable of the Treasure*)
 - When he finds that treasure it's like...when finding...
 - ...finding God.
 - Hey?
 - Finding God.
 - Ja, he looks for God and everything.
- 790 • He finds everything about God and he *believes* in this life.
- He finds God.

- And he covers it up again so no one else can read it, but he shouldn't do that so that everyone else can learn about God.
- He like...staying in that field...he doesn't, like, take it home because it's like someone else's and he thinks there's like more treasure.
- Ja, and also but...he covers it up again because he doesn't...want anyone else...anyone to, like, find out about the treasure he's found.
- Okay...well maybe he finds God...it's...he's so precious that he covers it up cos he doesn't want evil things to come and...take it.
- 800 • Ja.
- And stuff like that.
- And he's so happy he goes and sells everything else...he thinks God is everything to him...and he goes and sells everything else that he doesn't really need that he's bought for his pleasure.
- Yes.
- He goes back and buys that field so that he can maybe find out more things about God and stuff.
- Or, maybe, being with God all the time.
- Ja, okay...now the parable of the Pearl.
- 810 • He's looking for fine pearls...he's...God is looking for...
- ...Christian people.
- Ja.
- They can be *anyone*.
- Ja, they *could* be...they could be really people that don't sin, they don't swear...they don't like do other things...they don't...
- And also, in a way, it's like the parable of the hidden treasure.
- Ja.
- Yes.
- And then he finds...an unusual...like when God finds someone, like, very
- 820 *special*...in a very special way he'll take that one and give everything else away to look after you and stuff.
- He'll give, like, everything to you and then he buys that pearl.
- And, like, with the story in church where he lost his button and he went into the shop and he saw his button there in the second - hand shop...he bought them twice like...sort of...sort of thing.
- Um...that's all.
- Ja, that's about all. (2 minutes 44 seconds)

(Short break to hand out next parable before continuing).

- (Child reads the parable of the Net).
- 830 • These fishermen, they're like God's servants, like his angels, and they throw the net out into the lake and they catch all these *different* people...all these people.
- And then when the net is full they pull it to shore...they pull it back to shore...
- ...to heaven.
- Ja, to heaven and then they sit down to divide the fish...the good ones go into the bucket...they...they go with God, and they believe in him (*reads* 'and the worthless ones are thrown away'), like, the people that actually don't care about God, they

don't believe in God...even if God will protect them in his hands and try and teach them about him, they wouldn't listen. So they would like go and they would be thrown away and at the end of the age...

- 840 • ...which is like the end of the world...
- ...yes, like it's the end of the world which will probably happen...which would probably be like this at the end of the world.
 - That means they wouldn't survive.
 - What I thought was...the *lake* is like the world, the *shore* is heaven and the *fish*, human beings, of course.
 - And they will gather up the evil people among the good...from among the good...they would take the evil people away from the good people and throw them into the fiery...
 - ...furnace...
- 850 • ...is like a fire.
- Fire...there they'll cry and be, like, angry and grind teeth.
 - And they'll...like...cry, like they're in hell or something.
 - They'll actually realize when they're in hell that they've done wrong and stuff like that...probably...
 - What I think is that the fishermen, as you say, they throw their nets and bring it back to shore...
 - The shore is heaven.
 - The nets are getting the people, getting the good people and the bad people to realize and then the fish is probably us...so we...the net is full and when they pull,
- 860 well, us, back in...to heaven.
- And then they throw all the bad people away like they go...they just...they just won't *listen!* (*Imitating a teacher?*)
 - Ja, they don't love God.
 - They won't obey God.
 - Yes.
 - Yes, in fact, they've got no time for God.
 - Ja.
 - Then when they go back to hell they realize probably what they've done. And they had the chance to believe in God and they didn't take it. They need to co-operate
- 870 with God.
- And they shout and howl and stuff like that.
 - Ja.
 - Okay. (*Some whispering*).
 - (*To researcher*) Okay, we've finished. (2 minutes 58 seconds)

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